

Another Way Pt 2
Romans 3:21-31
July 31, 2022

In our study of Romans we are diving into the doctrine of Justification. Justification is the term used for the legal standing we have before God in Christ Jesus. Justification is a legal declaration by God that we are righteous and can be in His presence. This doctrine is the axis on which the whole gospel turns: How we obtain this right standing before God is critical to understand.

Man-made and man-centered religion says that man obtains this right standing before God by working for it. But God says that this right standing is a free gift purchased by Jesus' perfect life and sacrifice on our behalf on the cross. The contrast is stark. Either justification is something we do for ourselves through our good works or something that God does for us because of his love and grace. These two ways to God cannot coexist; they are mutually exclusive. To understand the true way to God, we must completely grasp the reason we cannot stand before Him; our sin.

Sin is the greatest obstacle in our relationship with God and others. All of mankind knows this and our innate sense of justice confirms that we must be judged for our sin and must pay the penalty for sin. How can a just God overlook sin? We are shocked and outraged when our judicial systems fail us. For example, when a serial abuser is let free and then goes and kills his family we are appalled. We ask where was the justice for those innocents? Likewise, it would be a terrible miscarriage of justice if God set sinners free to commit more sin. God's justice demands sinners reap the penalty for sin. Sin must be punished. But what if you get pulled over for speeding and the policeman lets you off with a warning. Is that a miscarriage of justice? You see, the difference is in our view of the offense.

That is why Paul begins this letter with a profound exposition of sin. A full and complete understanding of the sinfulness of man sin is absolutely foundational to our understanding of justification. The doctrine of total depravity is simply this: fallen man is completely and totally sinful. There is no good in man at all. All of his thoughts and actions are all tainted by sin. Man is completely sinful, totally depraved. He is helpless to save himself to earn God's favor. Is man only tainted by sin, or is man utterly sinful. If man is only tainted by sin, then there is some good in him which he can nurture and grow into good works that he can offer to God as payment for sin. However, if man is totally sinful, everything he is and does is corrupt and vile and is not acceptable to a God who hates sin with a perfect and eternal hatred.

Sin is the great chasm between us and God. How can a man be right before God? Job 9:2; How can he be clean? Job 25:4-6. Payment for sin is needed: either you spend eternity paying for it yourself or you rest in the finished work of the God of Wonder. 1 Peter 2:24, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness." God himself came to bring salvation. Salvation is from God. He bore our sins on the cross. Is 53:4-5 He was punished but for what reason - for our sake. So we see the righteousness of God in Jesus. He is the manifestation of God's perfection. No one is perfect and therefore we cannot be justified before God without some divine intervention.

The doctrine of man's sin, our total depravity, is rarely considered today. Why is this? Well, many Christians lack zeal for God's word, and so they rarely enter into earnest study of the Bible for themselves. They assume they don't have to feed themselves and, like spiritual babies, they never move past softened down versions of hard gospel truths. Also like babies who smear their dinner on their faces - very little of what is given actually gets actually swallowed and internalized. What they do ingest is at best a bland sort of spiritual porridge, never growing into solid doctrinal truth. Alternatively, sincere Christians can sit under false or poorly equipped teachers who do not lead their flocks to the lush pastures of gospel truth. These have their spiritual growth stunted by malnutrition. In either case, the doctrine of man's sin which is so critical to the understanding of the gospel is frequently glossed over or corrupted.

So then we have a distorted view of man- the Bible says that man is totally sinful but many Christians will say, no I disagree man is sinful but there is some good in Him. Some good that just needs to be grown, nurtured and taught and then the problem of sin can be solved. From this premise that there is some good in man then naturally flows so much of the errors we see in church today. Churches become self-help organizations, sermons focus on how to free your inner child (only someone who has never met a child could perpetuate the myth that children are naturally good and therefore excellent teachers of right and wrong), to work up your own salvation, to heal yourself, to attain your goals, to get what you need.

The focus then becomes on methods that appeal, that attract, that entice but never offend, never challenge, never confront. And that is how Satan works isn't it? Did God really say.... Maybe my sin isn't as dark as all that? Surely there is some good in me? This is a man centered gospel and it is a lie.

How then do you recognize a church that has bought into a man-centered gospel? Because the foundations of these churches are built on man and man's needs, these churches will often have some of the following characteristics:

- They will be focused on a single personality. They are run by rockstar preachers who are revered and sought after. Spending time with the pastor becomes a status symbol and only he can meet your needs.
- They look like well-oiled corporations. Programs run seamlessly by paid staff and the congregation is never asked to serve - just show up and be fed.
- They focus on numbers. Numbers of bible verses memorized or people converted this week or monies given or visitors.
- They make sure to remove all barriers to belief. They avoid difficult doctrine or any theology at all.
- They do not focus on building Godliness or maturity in their people. Discipleship is unimportant and rarely occurs.
- They have little need for prayer.
- They stress service borne of duty not of love and deepening relationship with God.
- They promote casual participation and superficial relationships.

- They lack vulnerability with each other.

However, when you truly grasp your sin and what Jesus did for you, then you will begin to shift your gaze from man to God. And how you view God - the fear of the Lord- transforms how you see your life, your relationships, your worship, and your church.

Selah:

- 1) What does it mean to be totally sinful? What are the implications of total depravity?
- 2) How does a man-centered gospel explain why God saves people? How does this differ from the true Gospel
- 3) Several of the marks of a man-centered church seem desirable: e.g. well run and effective programs. And don't we all want more people to come to Christ? And shouldn't we celebrate that? What is the difference then between how a God-centered Church views the things on that list?