

Therefore, Love

Romans 3:1-20

July 10, 2022

We just spent several weeks of examining the first portion of Romans 3 in great detail – verse by verse. Expository preaching attempts to glean the truths of Scripture and put everything in context; sometimes it takes time to tie all these ideas together. Today we step back to take a look at the bigger picture, recognizing that context is key.

Paul begins his epistles to the Romans, Ephesians and Colossians, with a lesson in theology then addresses the so what? For Romans, the first eleven of sixteen chapters, are a discussion of theology. Because of all that Paul tells us in these chapters, he tells us in Chapter 12 to give ourselves fully to God. Real communication happens when the listener gives full attention to the speaker. God doesn't tell us things about Himself and His requirements just for the purpose of educating us, to make us smart, but the things He tells us are intended to change us, to conform us into the image of Christ.

Paul, under inspiration of The Holy Spirit, devotes most of three chapters of this letter to discussing the wrath of God. As we will see, the wrath of God applies differently to the believer and the unbeliever.

The goal of this sermon is to connect the wrath of God to the love of God and how the love of God induces love in us and how this love is poured out in service.

Then we want to tie these ideas to Romans 12:1-2 where we are told to yield ourselves fully to God, which is our spiritual worship; we are told to be transformed by the renewal of our minds. The King James Version translates the Greek as reasonable service rather than spiritual worship. Reasonable is translated from *logikos* from which we get logic. The only reasonable or logical thing to do when we realize we have been delivered from the wrath of God is to give God *whole body worship*; this is acceptable to God.

Worship is not just singing and praying at the start of a church service. Worship is everything we do: loving our spouse, instructing our children, cleaning our house, doing you best at your vocation, submitting to authority, etc. All of these are spiritual worship, and this means you reorganize your whole life under God's authority. But why would we do this? Why would we go from wanting to do the things that please us to being completely sold out for God? Love for God is the pure motivation.

Where does this love come from? It comes from a fuller understanding of the wrath of God, a fuller understanding of how much God hates sin, a fuller understanding of how much God hates your sin; these things should provoke a greater love for Him, especially when we understand what He has done for us in Jesus. If God could love sinners such as we and sacrifice His own Son to redeem us, then the only reasonable thing to do is to love Him in return and to love our unsaved neighbors who remain under God's wrath. If we really understand the consequences of experiencing God's wrath, it should motivate us to share the gospel with them. The wrath of God should evoke fear in the unbeliever but should produce a high view of God in the believer.

Returning to the courtroom scenario as discussed last week, we find we are guilty as charged. All are under the law, but no one lives up to it. We want to be our own god and make up our own rules for life. We will tolerate God's laws only to the extent that they don't conflict with our laws. Most people think of themselves as being good because they *think* they live up to their laws, but, in reality, no one even lives up to his own laws. God says to man: This is My law, and you must obey it perfectly. No one does this and, so, we are all guilty. Everyone is born a rebel at heart. In Romans 7, Paul says that the law arouses sinful passions. The law does not produce the sinful passions in us, it only reveals them. In verse five he says these sinful passions bear fruit for death. When the Judge renders the verdict: we are guilty as charged, and the penalty is death.

A quality diamond is beautiful and its beauty is more clearly seen illuminated by a bright light when laying on a black velvet cloth. Similarly, salvation is most clearly seen when the spotlight of the Holy Spirit reveals sin in a dark heart. The darker the heart the more easily the transformation is seen. The inherent beauty of the diamond is not changed by the conditions under which it is viewed, similarly, salvation is just as beautiful in a person who never lived a debauched life as it is in the worst of sinners. Salvation is totally the work of God, and all that God does is beautiful.

Paul's writing style is one of introducing a topic then saying, "But now" or "But God", indicating that this teaching should make us realize that an application is coming. He uses *but now* fourteen times in his letters and *but God* eleven times. He begins verse 21 this way: "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" (Romans 3:21-22a).

Here we are standing in the courtroom in our filthy garments, guilty and under the penalty of death, then The Judge calls for His Son. Jesus comes into the courtroom in His blazing white robe, having perfectly obeyed all points of the Law, being perfectly righteous, having never sinned,

and the Judge offers you a plea deal. The Judge says, *I will punish My Son with all the wrath you have earned by your sinful life, and I will give you all the righteousness that My Son has earned by His perfect life. All you have to do is confess your guilt and believe that My Son will do this for you. If you do these, I will commute your sentence.* Do you accept this deal? The only reasonable response is to jump at such a deal.

Unbelievably, most people reject the deal. Why? Either because they are not willing to admit guilt, or because they think God's way is too narrow, too restrictive, or they think they can meet His standards. These all lead to death! If you accept the plea deal, God comes to you, removes the handcuffs and leg shackles, and welcomes you into His family. You are adopted into His family as a child of God and set free.

Now what? Do you huddle with your family and keep this newfound freedom to yourself? Do you engage in thievery or murder or debauched living, thinking to yourself that Jesus will continue to pay my debts? Neither of these is reasonable. If you have been set free by the Judge, you are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). You have new desires and motivations – ones that seek to please God, not to please yourself.

An encounter with the wrath of God is foundational to a renewed mind, a new heart, new behaviors, a new view of God. His removal of our deserved wrath is based on the satisfaction of the debt we owe; this demonstrates His love for us. God's love for the world is described well in a verse that all Christians know by heart, John 3:16. First John 4:10 declares, "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Propitiation means that God can be favorably disposed toward a Christian because His wrath was satisfied at Calvary. (A similar word, expiation, means that God is no longer angry with a Christian.)

God's love for us is well documented in Scripture: "Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will" (Ephesians 1:4-5); "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 John 3:1); "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Many other Scriptures tell us of the love of God. We are exhorted in 1 John 4:11, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." We can't know real love until we have been born again. Second Corinthians 2:14 explains, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

In Matthew 18:22ff, Jesus compared the kingdom to heaven to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. One servant owed him ten thousand talents (twenty years of wages). He was unable to pay so he begged for mercy. The king forgave his debt, but this same servant refused to forgive the debt of a fellow servant who owed him just a hundred denarii (one day's wage). When the master learned what the forgiven servant did, he threw him into prison until he paid his debt. Jesus said that we will not be forgiven if we do not forgive our brother from our heart. We owe God a debt that we can never pay but, if we have accepted the plea deal, our debt has been paid.

We are to imitate God in forgiving each other. John says we are guilty of murder if we hate our brother, and he exhorts us to lay down our life for a brother (1 John 3:15-18). Paul explains that we have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God (Romans 6:22), thus we are commanded to walk as children of light (Ephesians 5:8). John declares that the person who keeps on sinning (i.e., makes sin a lifestyle) has neither seen nor known Jesus (1 John 3:6). God's love is the root and the flower of forgiveness.

In light of God's love, let us review the accusations God has against us in Romans 3.

I. No one is righteous (v. 11)

We begin by reminding ourselves of 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." We are not righteous, but God accepts the righteousness of Christ on our behalf; He *declares* us righteous and those declared righteous live by faith. (Romans 1:17) We know that God cannot dwell in the presence of sin, so when we read of the marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19, we know that those around the table with Christ are ones who were first *declared* righteous but then *became* righteous upon their death. First Corinthians 15:51-52 confirms this, "Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be **changed**, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." It will be a glorious day when the saints are finally free of all sin!

II. Heart and mind are depraved (v. 11)

Proverbs 28:5 declares, "Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand it completely." This brings us back to 2 Corinthians 2:14 which explains that the natural man cannot accept the things of God. The world tells us that education is the answer; teach man about righteousness, then he will understand and change. We understand that man

cannot change his heart. A fish cannot live in a tree, but if by a miracle it becomes a dove, flying and living in a tree are natural for it. Because believers have been transformed by love, because we have been declared righteous, we will seek to become increasingly righteous. This is the process of sanctification. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6). Happiness, blessedness, satisfaction all result from seeking righteousness; seeking righteousness stems from a regenerated heart.

Jesus gave a promise for obedience in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." What are the things added? Freedom from worry, freedom from losing the things that are important to us, freedom from all the anxieties in life. All difficulties and dilemmas in life will be filtered through this verse if we truly love God and seek His righteousness. God will transform our priorities. When God transforms us, He gives us discernment. We are able to correctly identify the best course of action. We might be allowed to do a certain thing but, with discernment, we see that something else is better.

2 Peter 1:3-8 represents a virtuous cycle describing the process of sanctification. The pinnacle of this chain is love; love is both the starting point and the finishing point. "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul warns Timothy to be wary of the person who appears to be a believer because he is doing all the right things, but he is a pretender. He is "always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). He may be participating in Bible study groups, faithfully attending worship services and prayer meetings, watching/listening to preaching on TV or radio or media, etc. Yet the unregenerated man playing the part of a Christian is like a fish out of water.

III. Worthless (v. 12)

Worthless is a military term applying to a soldier who flees from battle. The opposite of worthless is described in Ephesians 6:12-18, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints."

Are you a cut and run Christian or a standing firm Christian? Are you renewing your mind, loving the things God loves and hating the things He hates; do you have a holy wrath against your own sin; do you seek to kill your sin or nurture it?

IV. Open Grave (v. 13)

An open grave describes the mouth out of which comes cursing, slander, abuse, etc. things that tear down people rather than building them up. We need to better understand the power of the tongue. Proverbs 18:21 explains, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits." Proverbs 10:11 and 10:32 compare the words of the righteous and the words of the reprobate. "The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence" and "The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked, what is perverse. James 3:9-10 says, regarding the tongue, "With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so." Colossians 4:6 and Ephesians 4:15 tell us how we should use our tongue: "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person" and "...speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ". The man who understands the love of God speaks differently from the unconverted.

V. Depraved Conduct vs. Redeemed Conduct (vv. 12-15)

Depraved conduct leaves a path of destruction and ruin. We compare this to the conduct and legacy of the upright. The upright is gracious, merciful, righteous, just, unafraid, and generous (Psalm 112:4-9). He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields it fruit in its season

(Psalm 1:1-3). The righteous flourish in the courts of God, bear fruit in old age and are ever full of sap and green (Psalm 92:12-15). These verses describe the man who loves God and others.

VI. No fear of God (v. 18)

There is a difference in meditating on the wrath of God for the believer and the unbeliever. The unbeliever should fear the wrath of God, but the believer sees the wrath of God as loving motivation to lead him to repentance. The unbeliever hopes that the wrath of God is not real because he might be under this wrath. If you have been set free, you don't fear God's wrath. 1 John 4:17-18 tells us we can have confidence on the day of judgment because there is no fear in love; perfect love casts out fear. The Christian doesn't have to fear punishment for sin, but we do need to understand that sin always results in consequences. We must seek to avoid sin, not just because of consequences, but because we don't want to pile more sin on our savior. We have a high view of God and this results in the kind of fear that is the beginning of wisdom. (Proverbs 9:10) The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil (Proverbs 8:13), a fountain of life (Proverbs 14:27), and leads to life (Proverbs 19:23). Solomon summarizes the importance of fearing God in Ecclesiastes 12:13, "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."

Jesus explained that love for God is the first and greatest commandment. Loving God is the key to godliness, wisdom, faithful service, happiness, marriage, singleness, triumph over sin, parenting, etc. It is the key to life. We love God with whole body worship; it is the only reasonable thing for the believer to do. The second most important commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. Your neighbor is your spouse, your children, your church, your community, your country and your world.

If you fear the wrath of God, don't ignore this fear! If you have doubts about your salvation, you need to speak with an elder to get clarity. If you have not trusted Christ, don't delay. "Now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). However, a Christian can have doubts regarding his salvation. Satan continually tries to discourage us by placing doubts in our heart; however, if you are doing the things that you know pleases God because you love God and desire to glorify Him, you can take comfort in John 6:37, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."

Selah:

1. Is anything keeping you from accepting the plea deal that God offers in Christ?
2. Do you understand how much you have been forgiven? Have you truly forgiven others?
3. How do you know whether you are a Christian or a pretender?

