

96-03-01b

We're back from our break and I just want to point out a couple of things in regard to what we have just covered because there are some implications in our own life. As we pointed out when we started out tonight, these truths have an effect on the way we view the unbelieving world, don't they, and our responsibilities in the area of evangelism. It makes us a little bit more balanced and a little bit more intelligent in the way we go about exploiting opportunities to communicate the gospel because we recognize that it isn't a matter of lots of people that are out there just looking for something to believe in and if we get there first with Christ, that's what they'll believe and if we just hustle hard enough, we can get a lot more people than if we sit at home.

That's not the issue at all. The issue in terms of the believer's part of evangelism is to recognize what Paul says in this verse, God has already confronted mankind with himself. There are people that have responded and there are people that have not.

For those who respond at the point of the self-expression of God in their soul, they need some additional information, don't they? We need to know about Jesus Christ. We need to know about what happened on the cross. We need to understand about the lake of fire and so forth and that person that is not irreverent and not impious and not completely disregarding the existence of God and the need to do something about spiritual things is going to be receptive to that information because they've already responded first of all to God.

They're not responding to us, they're not responding to the persuasiveness of our presentation, they're not responding to the eloquence of our giving of the gospel. They're following up on a decision they've already made between themselves and God and that's our role. We are a conduit through which the specifics of the salvation that this person has already responded to can come and we serve the Lord Jesus Christ in that way.

We are ready to give an answer to those who ask a reason for the hope that we have. We have a confident expectation of eternal life. We have an expectation of eternal life in Jesus Christ not only in the future but in this life.

Deliverance out of this present evil age. It ought to make a difference. We ought to look different in the world.

We ought to be known for that expectation and for the faith by which we live as some of the people that Paul writes to are known. These Romans, their faith, they have that as their reputation and someone who is confronted with God by God and responds to that and says I need to do something about this, I need to find out what God requires, is going to look around for someone who seems to have that information and God the Holy Spirit then can orchestrate someone who has the bag of seed and someone who has the receptive soil and the seeds of the gospel will be planted and will sprout because that is not hard packed ground. That's ground that

is receptive and is seeking the truth.

The same is true for believers. As we have pointed out, these principles are universal. Paul doesn't break this down really between believers and unbelievers.

Obviously the emphasis here is on the unbelieving world because the self-revelation of God is the initial point of contact and we are not talking about people that accept that and then fall off the wagon later. So the emphasis here is on unbelievers. But also the principle applies for believers.

There are people who have accepted Jesus Christ, who have acknowledged everything that is a part of salvation, who have been entered into union with Christ or sealed with His Holy Spirit and yet don't make any progress. When the opportunity to receive more truth, the opportunities for more faith, the righteousness of God is revealed by faith, for faith, and those subsequent opportunities are bypassed and exchanged for other things. These same consequences can take place and a believer can look very much and feel very much like an unbeliever, can experience the same kinds of darkness and the same kinds of misery and the same kinds of unproductiveness and unfruitfulness as an unbeliever because the pattern of decisions is the same.

Paul is going to explicitly make this point in chapter 2 and we will see that in detail next time but as just a preview you might take a look at Romans chapter 2 verse 1. Now notice, in this section of chapter 1 from verses 18-32, when the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against those who suppress this truth and unrighteousness, we're talking about these people in the third person, aren't we? Paul is the first person, he's writing, he's talking, he's talking to the Romans, they're the second person, they are the you in this equation, and then there's the them. There's I, there's you, and there's them. And this whole section of 18-32 here has been them.

They suppress the truth, God gives them over, they experience this darkness, they experience the results of all of these passive voice verbs of being given over and being darkened and so forth. But now look at chapter 2 verse 1, therefore you. Now we're changing categories of people.

We've been talking about the them that are out in the world that have suppressed the truth of God. Now we know that the people to whom Paul is writing have been addressed specifically as saints, right? To the saints who are in Rome, those who are set apart, beloved by God, he said in his introduction. You refers to that group.

You in chapter 2 verse 1 refers to those in chapter 1 verse 7, all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints. That's the second person in this letter. You, believers, are inexcusable, whoever you are, who judge, whenever you judge another, you condemn yourself.

When you look at the them that we've just been talking about, you say, oh, look at that unrighteousness, that immorality, that terrible suppression of the truth and unrighteousness. You, oh man, whoever you are who judge them, whatever you judge them with, you condemn yourself

for you who judge practice the same things. If you're looking and decrying the unbelieving world and all of the terrible evil that they commit and you sit there and judge them, you condemn yourself when you are doing the very same things.

This tells us that believers in Jesus Christ can follow these same principles. We are not persevering like the pea in tulip for the five-point calvinist, a true saint will persevere and be on the upward road and year by year will become more and more holy. Now, God is at work in you to will and to do his good purpose and so forth.

Those words have been twisted to say that if you're a true believer, just by virtue of being a believer, you'll get holier and holier. That's not what Paul says. He says, look, you can practice these same things and if you're practicing these things and you're out there, you're a hypocrite, you're condemning this stuff in the world and you yourself are doing the very same thing.

And so that's where we're headed. There's a big transition in chapter 2 verse 1 and that's the major key to understanding Paul's argument in the first part of this book. Why did Paul rehearse this truth that we've just seen in chapter 1? He's talking to believers.

He's not saying, oh, you unbelievers, remember God's revealed himself and you'd better wake up and respond to that revelation. He's talking about this to believers who have already responded to that revelation. He says, remember these people that suppressed the truth? I'm going to make a point about those people because you as believers can follow that same principle.

You can condemn yourself when you look at them and condemn them if you're practicing those same things. So that's the relevance. It isn't just a general introduction to the status of man and the way the gospel works.

Paul is going to use this truth and make a point from it and he's going to hammer that point home for believers in chapter 2. In connection with this, turn with me, if you will, as we close here to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 beginning at verse 18. We talked about the fact that this truth that is revealed by God is the power of God for deliverance. We would expect that since this is one of the primary truths that Paul communicates here in Romans, it might show up in some of his other writings and sure enough, it does.

First Corinthians, we know that the church at Corinth was a church that was plagued with problems. They weren't really pursuing the truth very well. They didn't get very far.

They weren't very mature. But in 1 Corinthians 1.18, Paul says, the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. Now, who are those who are perishing? Believers or unbelievers? Unbelievers.

But that same message of the cross, that same gospel is the power of God to whom? To us who are being saved, not those of us who have been saved, who were saved. This is the present

tense, who are being delivered. Because the principle is the same.

That truth about Jesus Christ delivered us at the point of salvation from the lake of fire, and it continues to deliver us. It's an ongoing thing, and that's the point that Paul is making here. It's the point he's going to make in Romans.

He doesn't just stop and say, you know, the goal is to get these people who are perishing to accept the truth and be delivered. His point is, you who have accepted that truth need to keep on being delivered by that truth. We need to keep on living, and that's why he says in Romans 1.17, the righteous shall live by faith.

That's the beginning of an ongoing process. Verse 19 of 1 Corinthians 1, it is written, this is Old Testament scripture, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? By the way, was a scribe thought to be a believer or an unbeliever? Believer.

Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to deliver those who believe, those who are believing. And this, once again, is the universal application of that principle. Is it true for unbelievers? Yes, it is.

Is it true for believers? Absolutely. We continue to be delivered as we focus on the truth and make it the object of our faith. The Jews request a sign, the Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified.

It's a stumbling block to the Jews and it's foolishness to the Greeks, but to those who are called, it is Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. That same preaching that converts people to Christ, delivers people, and it is Christ. It's Christ, the power of God.

Christ, the wisdom of God. The truth that we accept by faith as we have seen, that is how Christ is formed in us. That is how Christ dwells in us.

There's a lot of talk today about the personal nature of Christianity. It's a personal relationship. It's not a religion, it's a relationship, and so forth.

And people have talked a lot about, are you experiencing Christ in a personal way? And the heart on the heels of that is the encouragement to meditate and to pursue a sort of mystical sense of Christ's presence through whatever they're currently pitching. Very seldom do you hear people talking about the fact that the personal presence of Christ comes through the study of the word of God. That's not a very attractive message.

It's much better to sit and have a mystical experience and have something that satisfies a desire for experience, instead of looking at the truth and accepting it by faith and having that be the opportunity for more faith and having a reality built in our soul that changes our perspective for

life, our perspective of God and the universe. And we discover that as we learn things about what God is up to, and we learn some of these seemingly dry academic things about redemption and reconciliation and what God did in the past, what he's doing in the present, what he will do in the future, that as we look up from our study, we suddenly discover that the presence of Christ is very real and is very personal, because we're thinking just like he thinks. You'll forgive me for using this as an illustration, but on this new Star Trek show they have, they've got the guy that's the engineer on the ship, and he loves the engines, he loves the mechanical workings of the ship.

Well, he's got a certain problem to solve, and so he winds up delving into the records and finding the research and the notes and the work that was done by what turns out to be a lady that was this great astrophysicist, motor designer or whatever. And over the course of this episode, he starts to basically experience the personal presence of this gal through following the process by which she designed the engines and the technical challenges that she wrestled with and overcame and so forth. And by living in the same world with this gal, knowledge-wise, she comes to be real in his thinking.

And, of course, it kind of deteriorated from there, but the principle is the same for us. You can get into the mind of someone that's long dead. If you read the works of Mark Twain, that's probably a better example, but you can read an author from maybe the 1800s.

You can read the letters of Thomas Jonathan Jackson or Robert E. Lee or some of the other great writers. I love to read Theodore Roosevelt. I love to read his autobiography, even though it's a little bit self-serving and he tends to get a little pompous from time to time.

But by reading what he wrote, he becomes a living person and personality in my mind. And I feel like I know him. I feel like when I run into him in heaven, I'll be able to shake his hand and know him, even though I've never met him.

And that's what happens with Jesus Christ. And as we immerse ourselves in God's plan and God's purpose, we conform to the thinking of Christ, because that's what Christ thought about. That's what shaped his views and his priorities.

And we will look up from the page and suddenly discover the personal presence of Christ right there. And we didn't seek it through mysticism, and we didn't seek it as an experience. It just happens as a result of living the life of faith and seeing the reality of God and accepting it.

And that's what Paul is talking about here. And you might just flip over to the second letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians chapter 12, verses 9 and 10. This is when Paul is talking about the thorn in the flesh.

And he's quoting when the Lord spoke to him and said, My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, most gladly, I will rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. And the question comes up, well, how can we

experience the power of God? What does it mean for the power of God to be perfected in weakness, to be brought to completion in weakness? Well, what do we know about the power of Christ, about the power of God? It's revealed truth that is the power of God, isn't it? It's the revealed truth that is Christ formed in us.

And how did Paul face this weakness? How did Paul face this test? He faced it by looking at the reality of God's plan. And in looking at that truth and accepting it by faith, that's the way that God's strength becomes sufficient. That's the way the power of God enters the life of a believer, is through what God has said.

The Gospel is the power of God for deliverance, whether it's deliverance from the lake of fire, or deliverance from the thorn in the flesh, or deliverance from any other challenge that faces us. We have a clear, declarative statement of Scripture that it's the truth, the truth that's contained in the Gospel. And we know the Gospel encompasses everything that God has communicated to us.

That's the power of God for deliverance. So what a privilege it is to be able to study that truth and have God the Holy Spirit minister it to us inside our soul, make it real to us, help us to understand it, bring it to our mind as we go through the day and we suddenly find ourselves faced with a decision and we say, well, what am I really trusting here? God has said some things about challenges in life and what He's willing to provide if we accept it and so forth. And it becomes a reality and suddenly we find ourselves transformed because our minds have been renewed.

And we might just close by looking at one of my favorite passages, which is the first chapter of Colossians. All of these things are consistent because they are all a part of the Gospel that Paul preached and that he wrote about. And in Colossians chapter 1, verse 9, Paul is talking to another church and he says, since we heard about your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all the saints, we do not cease to pray for you and to ask, what? That you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

Paul knows where the power of God is. He knows how the glory of God is reflected. He knows what makes life worth living.

Why are we here? Are we just going to total up our bank account at the end of life and see what we left to the kids? Why do we get up and go through the day? What's our goal? Paul says, I pray for you that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. That goes back to that by faith, for faith idea. Because through that knowledge comes more knowledge.

Through that faith comes more faith. Strengthen with all might according to His glorious power. And there's that dunamis again.

That's where the power came from, is the wisdom and knowledge that comes. And that leads to

all patience and long-suffering with joy. Wouldn't it be great to not only be patient and be long-suffering, but to be joyful as we do it? Sometimes we reach the point where we can be patient, we can endure something, but we're not very happy about it.

We just know that, well, I know that I need to endure this. And we endure it patiently and with a great amount of long-suffering. But you don't typically associate joy with that process.

But the more orientation we have to what God is up to and how He is operating in our lives, we reach the point of actually looking at these things and being happy about it. Isn't it great that I'm having to endure? Isn't it great that I am having to put up with this grinding, grating difficulty? How do we reach the point of joy in a circumstance like that? It's by Paul's prayer being answered. Being filled with the knowledge of His will and wisdom and spiritual understanding.

Today in Christianity, the Word of God is so underrated. It's just one of many things. No one will discount the Word of God.

Everyone says, oh yes, it's important, read the scriptures. But we don't see that instead of being one of the apples hanging on the tree, it's the trunk of the tree. It is that from which everything else springs and upon which everything else in our life rests.

That's the conduit for the power of God. Without it, nothing else makes any sense. Our prayer life is meaningless.

Our efforts and our desires are meaningless apart from the place where God's power comes from and that is this truth. And that is what qualifies us to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

So that's what Paul is getting at. Paul is writing this book of Romans, he's writing this letter to believers. He talks about the unbelievers who suppress the truth and he talks about all of the darkness and all the terrible consequences.

But he's doing that to make a point. And that point is coming up in chapter 2. It's to motivate us to recognize how important it is to make that truth the object of our faith. Rejecting that truth is going to be the basis of eternity in the lake of fire.

That's one end of the extreme. And just as extreme as that eternal punishment is, at the opposite end of the spectrum is the extreme of God's glory and of a meaningful life and a worthy walk. And there are two opposite ends of the spectrum and the divide right in the center is the decision we make about the truth of God.

Is it the object of faith or is it that which we suppress? And that's the turning point there right at chapter 2 verse 1 is crossing that line from the negative side to the positive side. And Paul is going to exhort these believers that he has never met to pay attention to the revealed truth of God

because it is the power of God for deliverance. Let's close here in prayer.

Father, we thank you for the preservation of your word. We thank you that it is at the central point of your plan for us. Through this word, Jesus Christ is revealed.

It is the voice of the Holy Spirit as he speaks to us and guides us. It is that which conveys your power into our lives. We pray that these things will become a part of the resources in our soul and that the Holy Spirit will be able to take these things and make them real to us, remind us of them, show us the opportunities for application of these things so that our lives in the days to come will progress in the areas of reflecting the glory of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

We ask it in his name. Amen.