

96-06-07a

As we prepare for the study of the Word of God this evening, let's take a moment to clear our minds and prepare our hearts and remember that it is by God's grace that we have access to these things and that we live in the age that we do, and one of the great provisions that He has made for us is the Holy Spirit. There's been a lot of things said about the Holy Spirit, especially in our society and in Christianity today, and a lot of misunderstanding about what His role is, but the Bible clearly says that His job is to lead us into all truth, and whatever else you want to say about the Holy Spirit, the one thing that He does do is make it possible for us to understand the Word of God and to remember it and to apply it so that it makes a difference in our life. It's His presence that brings the power of God into us to change us and to use what we learn from Scripture so that it makes a difference, and so it's an important thing that we do when we stop at the beginning of a lesson and approach God and be sure that we are in a status where God the Holy Spirit can minister to us, that we don't have sin that we're harboring in our soul, that we don't have wrong motivation or that we're not still bearing a grudge.

Scripture says, do not let the sun go down on your wrath, and if you've still got some anger built up, it's a good time to offload that and to enter into the wonderful halls of grace that we roam as we look into the truth of God's Word. So let's pause and take this opportunity to prepare ourselves for the study of God's Word tonight. Father, we thank You, as always, for the many ways that You have expressed Your grace toward us.

You have given us life and breath. You have preserved us to the stage in life that we now find ourselves. You have provided security and clothing and shelter, freedom, the privilege of being Americans and living in a society that allows us to worship without fear and without persecution.

We thank You for the preservation of Your Word that has survived the ravages of the centuries and is in a form that is so easily available to us. We can get so many different translations and study helps, and we have every opportunity and every advantage in this age, and we thank You for that. We thank You for God the Holy Spirit, and we pray that as we study Your Word tonight that He will enlighten us and enable us to understand these things and to see the way that it makes a difference for us as we live our lives.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We continue tonight our study of the book of Romans, the letter that Paul wrote to the churches in Rome.

We know from our introduction that there were several different churches in that large city. And we find ourselves tonight continuing, having finished chapter 6, and getting ready to start chapter 7. We traced not long ago the argument of the book as we've seen it thus far, and if this was an academic setting, I could give you a pop quiz, and I could say, all right, you veterans of these many evenings that we've spent in Romans, what was the content of chapter 1? What was the content of chapter 2 and chapter 3 and chapter 4 and chapter 5? Instead, what I will do is spare

you that and simply say that Paul is teaching about how we should live as believers. The rampant idea then and now is that life consists in what you do and what you achieve in the visible realm, how people perceive you and what people think, how you yourself perceive yourself, and how well you think you're getting on in life, what level of financial success have we achieved, what standing have we achieved with family and friends and so forth.

It's the same dilemma that has faced everyone since Adam and Eve walked out of the garden. The difference is that we live in an age where God calls us to something different, and that's what Paul has been talking about in this letter. And it is a concept that is very difficult for us because in one sense it is very simple, and in another sense it is very difficult.

It is the idea that to live a life that pleases God, to live a life that counts in an eternal way, we have to be still. We have to not worry about achieving something. We have to not worry about making our mark or making an impression or achieving some particular goal.

We have to stop and rest, look at God, come to understand what He has revealed and trust in that and let that change us inside our minds. We have many illustrations of this. For example, suppose tonight that as we sit here and study, the door bursts open and in walk some uniformed people who gather us all up into a van with no windows, drive us off someplace, and as we are traveling, they hand us some camouflage utilities and instruct us to put them on.

We put them on. They hand us some M-16s. They hand us some rounds.

They hand us a helmet. And some flashlights with red lenses since it's going to be dark here before long. And they say, there is a hill that is defended by armed men.

We would like you people to take these weapons, assault and take that hill. Try to imagine that situation. What would you think? Is this a Waco thing? Have I been recruited by BATF? What is the situation? What is the purpose? Whatever this hill is and wherever it is, if it's defended by armed people, then they are going to be shooting back.

And I stand a very good chance of suffering bodily harm, injury and perhaps death. What's the point of this rather absurd illustration? Before you do something that seems abnormal and unusual like that, somebody had better give you a very good reason. Now suppose that this was 1941, and suppose that you were in California, and someone explained, oh, by the way, this is December 8th, and Pearl Harbor was bombed Sunday, yesterday, and we have just discovered that the Japanese have invaded California, and they have taken this hill, and if we don't get them off of it, their entire landing force is going to come ashore, and the west coast of the United States is going to be endangered.

You're the only people we can find, etc. Now you have a rationale. You understand why it's worth laying aside the normal concerns of life, the normal responsibilities.

There is a bigger issue at stake. There's a lot on the line, and now it's worth it. This is one of the principles that they teach young men who are going to lead, whether they're going to be NCOs or staff NCOs or officers in the military, that you can't just run around issuing a bunch of blind commands, especially in a war where you have an ongoing situation.

People need to have a fix on why they're there and what they're doing. Are you fighting for God and country? Are you fighting for home and heart? Are you fighting to defend mom and apple pie in the American way? Or whatever it is, but you have to have a reason. And one of the difficulties, think, for example, about our terrible experience in Vietnam.

Why did we have such a bad morale problem in Vietnam? People couldn't figure out what they were fighting for. You can hear it in the music from that era. And the people who came out of there and said, they grabbed me up out of my life, they sent me to this swampy, God-forsaken country I'd never heard of, and I'm getting shot at, my friends are getting killed, why am I here? And we had a lot of failure, and we had a lot of desertion, and we had a lot of very bad things that we don't like to think about in Vietnam.

And a part of that problem is that people didn't know what the heck they were doing or why they were doing it. Well, transfer that to the spiritual realm. Think about us as believers.

There is a big issue at stake, and many of us, we're not aware of it, and we don't think about it. And so, surprise, surprise, it is hard to be motivated. It's hard to keep our eyes fixed on the objective because we're not really aware.

It's not real to us that there is a spiritual conflict, that God has a purpose, that we are, in fact, defending the shoreline against an invasion, that there is a lot on the line. And it's natural, if we don't have that picture in our minds, to say, well, in the absence of any other information, I'm going to look out for number one. I'm going to look out for my safety and my happiness and my security.

What else is there? So, what God has done is revealed this truth, what the reality is. We have our five senses, and sometimes our six senses, and we perceive reality and we make our decisions, set our priorities based on that. God says, I'm going to give you some new information.

And we're just like those people in the van. Now that we have this new information, there is a good reason. There is a compelling reason and a motivation to live differently and to think differently and to have different priorities.

But there is still a decision, isn't there? Because you can still be given this information. You could be a soldier in World War II. Patty and I saw a thing on Channel 13 last night where they were going back through the invasion of the beaches at Normandy and Omaha Beach and Utah Beach and Gold and Juneau and Sword and all of the different problems that had to be overcome.

And the tanks were dumped off the ship 6,000 yards out and they swamped and only two out of 27 made it to the shore out of one unit. Troops were dumped out too far and many of them drowned and so forth. Men on that day, looking around and seeing the chaos and the confusion and the obstacles and the shells and bullets ripping into the water around them, what made them go forward and go ashore and overcome all of that to take the obstacle? It wasn't that, well, my life was going nowhere anyway, here's some excitement, join the service, see the world, meet new people and kill them.

In those days we instilled a lot more patriotism and a lot more love of America and the way of life here than we tend to do now. And there were men who said, my country has called me, we are fighting the Hun, we're fighting totalitarianism, we're fighting injustice, we're fighting people that are putting other people in death camps and it's worth it. It's worth it to go into this mortal danger for an idea, for a principle.

And men, believers and unbelievers alike, marched out of those landing craft and went forward, many of them to their death, because it was important and they believed in a cause. We are not called to mortal danger, we are called to a calling that is actually going to make our life, it's going to give us things that are beyond our comprehension if we could only realize what's on the line. And God says, He wants us to have the motivation, He wants us to understand the situation that we're in so that we will set aside earthly goals and human thinking and go forward for this goal.

What we want to look at tonight is how God has done this, what it is that He expects from us. God has revealed some truth. And we find this as a recurring theme in Romans, it's going to come up again here in chapter 7, where you can see right at the beginning of the chapter, Paul says, Do you not know, brethren? Do you not know? We've heard this as a refrain in Romans.

Do you not know? We know. Over and over again we find this phrase, we know, do you not know, and so forth. So we want to pause tonight and take a look at this and see how this fits in.

Why is it important to know these things? What is the purpose and what is it that we should know? And how do we answer the question, so what, about the things that are being talked about? Well, we're going to restrict ourselves to the book of Romans tonight, and we're just going to look at the concept of knowledge or knowing in the book of Romans, because this is an illustration of how it works in the entire Bible. Why do we bother to learn anything as Christians? Why don't we just say, I've got my ticket, my fire insurance, and I don't have to sweat the lake of fire, so the big issue is settled, and now I'm basically just going to get along and get by and try to be happy until Christ comes back or I check out. God wants us to wake up to a larger and grander reality.

It's the real reality that we can't perceive with our senses. We can't see it, we can't touch it, we can't feel it. It's revealed by God the Holy Spirit.

It's revealed in the pages of the Word of God. And because we have no sensory ability to verify it, once it's revealed to us, we have to make a choice. We have to say, okay, that is reality, or I don't really think so, and go with the things that our senses tell us.

How does that work out in Romans? I'm going to just give four brief points, and then we're going to look at this concept through Romans. First of all, Paul introduced this right back in chapter 1, and although this may seem like review, it's really not. Back in chapter 1, this concept was introduced.

Romans 1, verse 16. Paul says, this information that's in the Scriptures, this information that I preach about Christ and the age that we live in and the future that's coming up, I am not ashamed of that information. I don't hang my head, I don't shuffle in sideways and say, well, you know, there is some other truth I don't really want to bother you with it.

Paul is not ashamed. Paul boldly proclaimed it. He was beaten for it.

He was thrown out of cities. He was stoned with stones. He was imprisoned.

He was shipwrecked. He was despised. He was rejected by his countrymen.

He lost his social standing as a Pharisee and as a respected member of the Jewish community. He was spit on. He was laughed at.

He was scorned. But he said, and it was all on account of this message, this information that he was giving that nobody else had. Paul was the first man to really get this information, especially as it applies to us.

And he said, I am not ashamed of this gospel of Christ. And we think the gospel is believe and be saved, but the gospel is everything that's in this book. It's everything that is going on in God's plan.

He says, I'm not ashamed of that. It is the power of God for deliverance. We may think that deliverance in life comes from the things that everyone pursues.

Everyone pursues life and liberty and happiness, don't we? That's the American way. We pursue entertainment. We pursue stimulation.

We think if I watch this movie, I'll be entertained. If I listen to this record, I'll be entertained. If I go to this amusement park, if I spend the weekend in this location, we look for something that picks us up and stimulates us and gives us a joy for living and so forth, don't we? That's a natural thing.

But those wear off. It's temporary. I was thinking about this earlier today.

You see this a lot in the entertainment industry where I see them introduce these new stars.

Somebody makes it big in a TV sitcom or they're introduced in a movie. Suddenly the press is hounding them.

Well, you've won an Emmy. You've won a Tony. What are you going to do now? This person has had their aspirations and their dreams to succeed as an actor or succeed as an entertainer, and now they've done so.

They're on top. They're applauded and so forth. Well, now what? And it's amazing because you look at people and they never say, well, you know, here's a 60- or 70-year-old lady.

Well, you know, back in 1946, I won the Academy Award for *Gone with the Wind*, and my life has just been roses ever since. Whenever I get a little down, I just look at that Oscar up on the mantle, and I'm once again warmed and filled and content. That achievement has just sustained me through all the rest of my life.

It never happens that way, does it? People commit suicide with Oscars on the mantle, and they go to drug addiction and they go to sleeping around with dozens of people and using money in all different ways to buy themselves boats and houses and cars and so forth, and it never satisfies. It's like the apple that Eve and Adam took a bite of. You bite it and it turns to ashes.

And you say, I just need more apples. And you keep biting and it keeps turning to ashes. And you say, well, maybe the next one.

Maybe if I do this. And it has become a truism in life and in literature that if you ever attain your goal, you're finished because you find out that there's nothing more. And people wind up deciding that the joy is in the striving to attain rather than achieving the goal.

And it's a very lame way to get through life because you try to go from one stimulation to the next. God says, I've got something different for you. But in order to receive it and in order to experience it, you have to throw over everything that you currently believe.

You have to essentially lose your life. You have to be willing to set aside your goals, set aside your dreams, set aside your aspirations, and instead devote yourself to God's aspirations, God's purposes. You have to do this act of what boils down to being humble, recognizing that there's something more important than what I want.

It's what God wants. It's what these men did when they went ashore. There's something more important than my personal safety.

I may die in this attempt, but there's something more important than my life. We have to make that mental adjustment, that decision, that when God starts to reveal what His plan and purpose is, that that's more important than what our plan and our purpose is. And it's a big step, and it's called faith.

It's called trust. And that when we do this, God will take care of us. And we have many promises in Scripture.

Jesus told the disciples, I think we saw this Scripture last week, that those who have given up houses and lands and possessions and mother and father and sister and brother for my sake will receive a hundredfold in the kingdom. The small sacrifices that we make, we're not asked to give our lives. We're not asked to bleed and die.

We're simply asked to think differently, to have different priorities and different goals, to concentrate on something different. And God says you will get back a hundredfold what you think you're giving up. But it still requires faith because we have no verification.

We can't touch it, we can't feel it, we can't see it. It only comes from what God says in Scripture and how the Holy Spirit reveals it. That's the subject of the letter to the Romans.

The big illusion that was prevalent in that day and in this day was that if you want to be happy, if you want to be blessed by God, if you want to be approved and enjoy a good standing with God and man, do good works. And here they are. They're spelled out in these five books in the Old Testament called the Law of Moses.

You need to be circumcised. You need to observe these feasts. Here's the formula.

If you do these 472 things, you're set. Well, A, nobody can do them. B, the purpose for which God gave them was not to make people righteous or to make them happy.

It was to show that they were unrighteous and make them miserable. That's why God gave the law. That's what we saw in Romans chapter 3, wasn't it, when he talked about the Jews.

What advantage is there in being a Jew? Because all the law does is condemn you and show that you're full of sin and it doesn't make you righteous. By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified, for by the law comes the knowledge of sin. That's why God gave it.

So what a crazy thing to take the law and say, this is a system of righteousness and this is a system of happiness because that's diametrically opposed to why God gave it. God said, I want you to see how sinful you are and I want you to be miserable. Why? So that you'll realize that you need Jesus Christ.

You need something outside yourself. You have to be willing to say, I can't do it. I haven't got it.

I'm hopeless and helpless and useless. I am not righteous. I am filthy rags.

If I have any righteousness at all, God is going to have to give it to me. And that takes humility. It wounds our pride.

It pricks our ego. We don't like to, a lot of us say, well, you know, I don't believe in accepting help from someone else. I make it on my own.

God helps those who help themselves. That's not a biblical concept. God says, if you're trying to help yourself, you're going to lose your life.

It's when you look to God for help and say, I haven't got it, that you're going to receive. So our first point here, and it begins in Romans chapter 1, Paul says, I'm not ashamed of this news. This is the power of God for deliverance.

If you really want to be delivered out of the emptiness of this world and the emptiness of this age and the fruit that turns to ashes, if you want to be delivered, listen to this message. This is the power of God. It's the same power that created the universe and designed the human body and all of the other wonders that we see around us.

That power is accessible to us. Everybody talks about the power of God, but very few people have it. The power of God is not blathering away in tongues.

It's not trying to get some physical disease healed. The power of God is much bigger and grander than that. Paul says the power of God is in this message.

It will deliver us. Everyone who trusts it, the Jew first and the Greek. It doesn't matter where you start.

You can come from a Christian home or you can start in the gutter. It doesn't matter. When he says the Jew first, that was all the religious people that everyone looked up to, and the Greeks were the pagans with all the little terrible looking pornographic art and idols and things.

If you've ever seen any of the stuff in Greece, I spent some time in Athens because we couldn't get into Beirut because it was too many people shooting and so forth. And so we sat for a week in Athens. And so we went to the Acropolis and went to this and that and the other and all these old falling down ruins.

And they have these relics that they dug out of the ground. And the Greeks were the worst pagans. You've ever seen these images of men and images of women? It's just grotesque.

And they don't put that stuff in catalogs, not the catalogs I've ever seen, because it's just pornographic. And they had their pornography and it was a big booming business just like it is today. And so when Paul talks about the Greeks and he's talking about the Jews, these are the religious and the pagans, the high brow, holier than thou, and the low brow, there ain't nobody lower than me types.

And he says this message, the truth that God is trying to reveal and get us to pay attention to and think about is the power of God to deliver you whether you're a Jew or whether you're a Greek.

Top of the scale, bottom of the scale from a human standpoint. Why? Look at verse 17.

For in it, in this message, the righteousness of God is revealed. It's revealed from faith to faith, out of faith into faith. It's not just revealed.

God doesn't put it up on a billboard and it's just there for anybody to look at. It's there if you're willing to receive it. That's why Jesus always said, we saw this in Mark, He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear.

And that goes back to the Old Testament. It's very fascinating. If you want to see something interesting, go back to the book of Isaiah and to some of the prophets where it says, let him who has an ear hear, because Jesus is harking back and that was supposed to remind the Jews of something that the prophets had said long ago.

You ought to be listening to what's being said. You ought to be paying attention to this. My girls are listening to some Bible story records that my parents got back in 1960 or so.

They're very old, but they're like radio shows where they act out these things with sound effects and so forth and your imagination can paint in the picture. Well, one of these is Noah and the flood. And so they have all the people and they've got these two young girls.

One of them is a daughter-in-law of Noah and the other one is some pagan out there. And they become friends and this girl says, what's this deal with your father-in-law Noah? He's building this boat and don't you think he's a little weird? And this other one says, well, you know, God says that there's a flood coming and we're getting ready. And she says, won't you please join us? There's plenty of room in the ark.

Won't you come? We've become good friends. And this girl says, oh, I don't know. You know, we've got a party going on and so forth.

And to one girl, what God said is a reality. The flood's coming. To the other one, it's this kind of scatterbrained stuff and there's too many immediate goals to meet.

Well, one of them's inside and one of them's outside when God shuts the door. And this dramatization goes on and this girl is now outside, beating on the ark, calling this girl's name. Remember me, remember me, let me in.

I believe you now and so forth. And it's too late. And what had been kind of a far-off, sort of a funny belief is now very real, but it's too late.

That's what we're called to. Do we believe what God says and are we going to act on it or are we going to be there banging at the door at the judgment seat of Christ saying, well, you know, I heard that, but I just, I was too busy, I was too concerned with other things. That's why Paul wrote this letter.

And that's why he says in verse 17 in this gospel, this message that I'm putting in this book, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. It's by faith that we receive this. We have to trust it, that if God said it, it's so.

As it is written, the just or the righteous, the ones that are accepted by God and declared to be righteous will live by faith, not by sight, not by the standards of the world. So that's the point. Chapter 1 states this.

God's attitude toward people depends on how they treat this truth that he's revealed. And that's why the very next verse says what? We have two different things being revealed. The righteousness of God is revealed in verse 17.

What's revealed in verse 18? The wrath of God. Now we use this as a phrase today. We say, well, you know, it's raining like the wrath of God or something.

But this is a serious thing. The God that created the universe and put the constellations and the planets and everything else in place that is so great it's beyond comprehension, if he gets angry, it's going to be a big deal. It's not a little pouting session.

It's not going to be a little thundercloud rolling across the sky and then everything is fine again. The wrath of God is what produced the flood. The wrath of God is going to melt this earth and the entire universe with a fervent heat.

The wrath of God is going to put people in the lake of fire for all eternity. It's not going to put us there, but the wrath of God is a serious thing. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, all unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

Now, this hits us right where we live. He's going to go on and talk about all these people who suppress the truth about God when it comes to his existence and his deity and the fact that he's there, that he created us, and that he's got a plan. People can push that away at the very outset and they never become believers.

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven and there's going to be a terrible penalty to pay and all the rest is paid now and is paid in the future. That's what chapter 1 talks about. But this is God's general attitude toward people who suppress the truth.

God has gone to a lot of trouble to reveal the truth. He has had this book, these 66 books, written over a period of 2,000 years. He's preserved it.

He has had different godly men give their lives to preserve this book down through the ages. Men have devoted their entire life to doing nothing more than copying these pages so that we would still have them today. And that was a part of God's purpose.

It is not an accident that we have this is the only ancient book that has survived in an accurate

form of any of them you want to name. Go back to any ancient piece of literature and we've got versions that disagree so widely we're not sure what the original said. But this book, we have a high degree of accuracy because God has preserved it.

And he does that for a reason. He reveals himself in this truth and we're responsible for it. And his wrath is revealed from heaven against people who suppress it.

So that's a big point and that's point number one. Now, knowing this truth, knowing the truth that God reveals and not acting on it, not responding to it, we see this happen today. All of this stuff about smoking and secondhand smoke and all of that, that's a big example that people use.

Drunk driving, motorcycles without helmets, there are facts that we know about. Take motorcycles and no helmets as an example. We know that riding a motorcycle with no helmet results in fatalities.

And people say, I know that but I like the wind in my hair and the bugs in my teeth and I'm not going to wear a helmet. Helmets are for wimps. And so they go their way.

That's fine. And it ought to be fine. And in my personal opinion, I don't think there ought to be a law for helmets on motorcycles.

If a guy wants to fly off his bike and give himself a crushed head and die, it's a free country. But he's responsible. He knows that truth.

And it's on his own head, literally, if he doesn't take advantage of that knowledge and wear a helmet. I think it's a smart thing. When I ride a motorcycle, I wear a helmet.

I don't like them, but I wear it because I know enough about my coordination and about the type of drivers we have in Dallas to figure I better have a helmet on if I'm on a bike. Well, we make a choice based on knowledge that we have. People who intentionally go out and abuse substances, especially crack, cocaine, and that kind of thing, they have the knowledge.

They know what this does. They know what it can lead to, and they do it anyway. They have the knowledge, but they don't act on it.

So there's two things. You've got to have the knowledge, and you've got to decide what you're going to do with the knowledge. That's the exact position that we are in as believers.

God has given us this knowledge, and he's made more of it available, and we have to decide what are we going to do with this knowledge. And Paul comes flat out at the beginning of the book, and he says, Look, knowing this truth and not responding to it is going to bring the wrath of God on you just like it brings the wrath of God on unbelievers because God has revealed himself to them. They suppress that truth, and they're going to the lake of fire.

Do you, oh man, in chapter 2 think that you will escape if you know that the truth of God is there and you don't act on it and you continue to live your life just like your next-door neighbor who's an unbeliever, the same goals, same priorities, same ways of working through problems? If you do that, if you make those same goals, the wrath of God is coming, and you are forewarned just like if you fly off your motorcycle, you know what's going to happen to your head. So we are without excuse. Paul makes that point in chapter 1, doesn't he? They are without excuse.

And in chapter 2 he says we are without excuse. And not only that, but what is it that we're really seeking? Why would we set aside the truth of God and say, well, you know, I just don't want to get into all of that right now. Why would we do that? Because secretly, in our heart of hearts, we think, I'm going to be miserable if I do that, and I'll be happier if I pursue these things that I think will make me happy.

Isn't that really the reason down deep in our hearts? We think, you know, religion, it sounds like a lot of work. I just think, you know, if I do these things, I'll be happy. And so we just kind of push it aside, we hold it to the side, and continue on.

Well, Paul goes on to say, not only is the wrath of God coming in the future, but you will lead a life of futility and darkness now. This is in chapter 1, verses 19, 20, and 21. Now this is going somewhere, so stay with me.

He says, what may be known of God is manifest in them. God has shown it to them. His invisible attributes are clearly seen.

They are understood by the things that are made. His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse. Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, and they were not thankful.

They became empty in their imagination, and their foolish hearts were darkened. They became empty in their thoughts, and their hearts were darkened. And the principle is the same even for believers.

The fact that we've got a ticket out of the hot place does not mean that if we suppress the truth of God, we will not have the same thing happen to us. Our earthly life will be full of futility and darkness. And we'll be constantly wondering, why am I not happy? I ought to be happy.

Look at all of these things that are available to me, and I don't find myself being happy. Look at the celebrities. Look at all the things we've seen in our society where people get things, and we would think, oh boy, I would trade places with Ross Perot in a minute.

Look at all the money he's got. Look at all the power he's got. I wouldn't trade places with Ross Perot for all the money in the world, because I don't think Ross has got the purpose of God at the center of his life.

And I'm not just picking on him. He comes to mind because he lives here in Dallas. But you can look at anybody, and if there's anybody in the world that you would trade places with, looking at their circumstances, stop and think.

Has this person got a grip on the eternal purposes of God? Does this person got this truth that God has revealed, and are they following it? Now there's a person I would trade. Would you trade places with the Apostle Paul to have the status and the standing that he's got? I would. That's my goal.

My goal is to follow his example. But look at his life. Shipwreck, danger, prison, etc.

But look at where he has ended up. He is high on God's list of acceptable people. And what else do you want to show for your life? I was reprinting some pictures of my ancient relatives here this past week.

My great-great-grandfather and so forth, leafing through some letters and things that have come down to me from my grandmother. And it's very interesting. You get just little insights into somebody's life that lived 100 years ago or 120 years ago.

It was the 1870s or the 1880s, and people were riding horses and using gas lights. Towns that are real big in California were little villages that were just starting and so forth. And I look back at that, and I think they had their hopes and their dreams.

They had their aspirations and so forth. What has become of all of that? The only reason anybody knows anything about it is this little yellowed letter has survived in a box someplace, and some great-great-grandson is reading it. Otherwise, nobody would even know.

No one remembers their name. No one visits their grave. No one has any idea of the business that they created or lost, the house that they kept or didn't keep, the kids that they had or didn't have.

It's all blown away in the wind. And now what? Those folks are going to be resurrected and are going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and what are they going to present? Well, you know, back in 1875, I got my flowers potted, or I got my laundry in faster than my neighbor, or, you know, whatever it might be. When you put it in that perspective, it just seems so insignificant compared to the eternal realities that surround us.

So this is what Paul is trying to wake us up to here. And how is he doing that? It's with information. This is the information age.

If Paul was an apostle today, he'd be on the Internet. He would be on CompuServe, and he'd be posting messages from Paul, comma, apostle, to all. And he would be shooting it out there, saying, Look, wake up, this is coming.

And he would get much the same response today that he got then. He would get the same response Jesus Christ today would get, the same response that he got 2,000 years ago. God incarnate walked among us as human beings, and we missed it.

We missed the bigger reality. He's a raggedy rabbi. He doesn't even have a house.

He doesn't have an organization. He doesn't have a... What's he calling me to? I'm not going to make any money. I'm not going to achieve any security.

The Romans are going to be down on me if I follow this guy. The religious right is going to be after me. All the conservative Pharisees are going to be dogging my steps.

I'm going to be thrown out of the synagogue. I'm going to be an outcast. What is this guy offering? He's offering something intangible.

He's offering something eternal. And the same thing happens today. So this is how we were set up in chapter 1. And why Paul went through all of that is not to give us a lesson in how to win the lost.

It's to say the principle is the same. They suppress the truth, and the wrath comes. They accept the truth, and they are delivered.

The same thing happens for believers. So knowing and not responding leaves us without excuse as Christians, as believers. And it will result now, presently, in a life of futility and darkness.

If you look at your life and you say, I'm not getting anywhere, I'm not satisfied, I'm not happy, look at the goals. All of us need to do this. If we find ourselves discontent, if we're not waking up and going through the day saying this is a great life, we're pursuing the wrong goal.

We're living the life of darkness and futility. And it's a promise from God that if you're not pursuing His goals, especially as a believer, that's how you're going to wake up, that's how you're going to live every day. So there's really no point in wasting our time pursuing these things anyway, because the way God has structured His plan, if we don't get with His plan, we're going to be miserable anyway.

The third point is the glory of God is communicated in truth. To push away the truth is to exchange the glory of God for corruption. If somebody held a gold bar in their right hand and they held a putrefying corpse of a roadkill in the other hand, which would you pick? Not a hard choice.

I've got a gold bar from Fort Knox in my right hand, and I've got a three-day-old dead cat in my left hand. Which one would you like? Which one would you like to tie around your neck? It's not a hard choice, but we make that choice every day. If we pick earthly things instead of the glory of God, that's what we're doing.

We're picking the dead cat. And it's going to give us all the pleasure and all of the warmth and all of the light and security and eternal reward of that roadkill. And we have this in verse 23 of chapter 1. When you push away the truth, you exchange the glory of the incorruptible God for corruptible things.

They pass away. They vanish. They turn to ashes.

They turn to dust. They become meaningless. Now, our fourth point, Paul's explicit applications of knowledge in Romans are what we're going to look at here tonight.

There are maybe 10 or 12 of these passages. These are passages where Paul says something about knowledge, something about what God has revealed. Now, everything he says in the book, this principle applies to.

But these are the places where he makes a point of it. He emphasizes it. He says, we know this.

Don't you know this? God has revealed this. Haven't you caught on to this? And when he mentions that explicitly, it's important. So we're going to look at those tonight.

We're going to pause here and take our break. And when we come back, we will go rather quickly through these verses just in Romans where Paul points out why it's important to know and why it's important to act on what we know. And at the end of that, we're going to find that we're at the end of the book of Romans and we are at the end or the goal of God's plan for us as believers.

So we'll see that as soon as we come back.