

Lesson 3 --- November 16, 2017

Below are portions of John's sermons that will enable you to answer the questions.

Question 2 --- Answer the following questions from Romans 3:12.

a. Summarize the term "useless."

Romans 3:12 says, "*Together they have become useless.*"

Man in his sinful condition is utterly useless. This term "useless" is okay as far as it goes, but it does not effectively convey the full meaning of what is being said about mankind. Man is useless in regard to his created purpose of being God's representative on earth. God made man in His own image to reflect God and have authority on earth. But man has utterly perverted and twisted the image of God. Man now suppresses God and desires to exalt himself. Man does not rule as God's representative. He rules for his own selfish ends.

We saw that man can add nothing of worth by way of man-made religions, or man-made philosophy, or worldly wisdom. All of man's efforts toward contributing anything of eternal value are utterly void. Jesus said in John 6:63, "*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.*" Any blessing that can benefit you must come from the grace of God by way of the person of Jesus Christ through His Word and through the Holy Spirit.

The word "useless" is okay in describing mankind, but it does not go far enough. When we go to the Greek word translated "useless," there is added meaning of "perverse," "damaged," "corrupted," "depraved," and "spoiled." We gain a further sense of God's full intent as we go back to the Old Testament to see the verse that is quoted here in Romans 3. Psalm 14:3 *They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt* [corrupt in the sense of being putrid, rotten]; *there is no one who does good, not even one.*

So when we put it all together, we get a more complete understanding than just "useless." Man is perverse, morally and spiritually damaged, corrupt, depraved, spoiled, and rotten. The Hebrew word here carries the meaning of stinking and putrid, like maggot-infested meat. Man is dead, and he stinks. He is rotten. Man is not good for anything but to be thrown on the rubbish heap. His only worth is to be thrown onto the trash heap of eternal hell.

Barnhouse wrote, "To be unfit for the use for which we were designed shows what sin did for the race, and how far man is estranged from God. Apart from the grace of God and the redemption that was provided in Christ Jesus there can be no use for man in

this universe. The rot of idolatry has corrupted the race, and the initial object of that idolatry is self. It is the exaltation of self which has brought all these other ills in its train.”

b. Give John’s reminder as we study total depravity.

I remind you that as we study the doctrine of the total depravity of man be slow to think only in terms of the world at large or other people. Total depravity refers to you and to me first and foremost. We must understand the depths of our own sin before we will know the greatness of Christ as Savior. One writer put it this way, “If only that which is in you were allowed to be manifested, and if the opportunities were available for all that is in you to be spread across the world, it would still be in the same condition that it is in today.”

Question 3 — Contrast mankind’s fear of God to a biblical fear of God.

Verse 18 refers to the fear of the judgment of God. Mankind does not rightly fear God as he ought. Unbelievers, those who are not saved, do not fear God when in reality they should have a great terror of Him. The reasonable and right response to how God has manifested His presence through creation should be a fear of the God who has such power. It is not courageous to ignore fear when the threat to life is overwhelming and when a positive alternative is available.

For example, it is not considered brave and courageous to stand on train tracks when a charging locomotive is coming straight for you. It is considered foolish. It is not brave to lay prostrate in front of a herd of stampeding buffalo. It is foolish to not run to get out of the way. In an infinitely greater fashion, man fails to fear the God whom he knows is there and whom he knows is a just and righteous God.

We have already considered fear in our study of Romans 1:32. *Although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death* [death and eternal separation from God in hell is something that one should rightly fear], *they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.* This reality of the fear of God is reiterated in Hebrews 10:31 *It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Our warning mankind of this eternal danger is part of our message of the Gospel. We warn men and women of the danger that their next breath could be in the very presence of God. Man's sin and God's judgment are the backdrops on which we speak the good news of Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection. So there is a legitimate place for the abject fear and terror of God. Jesus taught that man should fear God who has power to punish sin and send men to utter destruction.

In Luke 12:4-5, Jesus said, *“I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill*

the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!"

Revelation 14:7 Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.

Mankind treats God as optional. There is coming a day when God will intervene either by way of death or by Christ's return, and God will not be optional on that day. On that day, no man can ignore God. All will fear Him, but the greater fear on that day will be that there is no hope of escaping judgment. There is hope today, but when death comes or when the Lord returns, there will only be fear without any hope.

We have been through weeks of studying the depravity of man. We do not need to be afraid of this doctrine of total depravity. The total sinfulness of man is one of the foundational doctrines in all of Scripture. Those who truly are mature in the Christian faith are those who have a growing knowledge of their sinfulness which leads to a growing understanding of the eternal value of Christ. Paul viewed himself as the chief of sinners towards the end of his life.

Luke 5:31-32 And Jesus answered and said to them, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. 32I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Question 4 --- Summarize the couple of truths concerning the law that were given to help clear our thinking. Based on these truths, what possibly needs to be adjusted in your thinking and behavior?

There are a couple of truths that I want to make clear in your thinking concerning the law. First, "*works of the Law*" simply refers to any good deeds or the abstinence from any evil deeds done with the intent of appeasing the justice of God. For example, this would apply to the Catholic requirements of attending mass, going to confession, or doing penitence. This would apply to getting baptized, going to church, or living by the Golden Rule.

Titus 3:4-7 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, 5He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness [Paul might have said, "not on the basis of our keeping the law"], but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

So “works of the Law” refers to any good deeds that you do in righteousness in order to be acceptable to God. Nothing you do has anything to do with you being made right before God.

A second truth that I want to make clear concerning the law is that the Law was never given to Moses with the thought that anyone would ever keep it. The Law was a standard that was given in order to convince men of their hopeless sinfulness, so that they might come to God for grace.

Galatians 3:21-24 If a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. 22But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin [we are all accountable to God], so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. 23But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the Law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. 24Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

The Law of God is like a mirror. For example, the purpose of a mirror is to reveal that your face is dirty. The purpose of a mirror is not to wash your face. When you look in a mirror and find that your face is dirty, you do not reach over and take the mirror off the wall and attempt to rub it on your face to clean your face. The mirror is to drive you to the water.

One pastor put it this way, “The Law is pure white to show man how dark he is. The Law is perfection to reveal imperfection. The Law is a gold brick in the balance scales to show how useless man's dust of good deeds are. The Law is an infinite demand required of finite man. The Law is the necessary prerequisite to grace, because man would not take the provision of God until he was convinced that he could do nothing himself.”

Question 5 — Read the sermon excerpt that explains “but now.” Write the main point in one sentence. Briefly share your initial response when the Lord first enabled you to understand “but now.”

“But now” expresses the thought of before and after the provision made by Christ, then and now. Before we were dead in our sins; now we are born again and have eternal life. Before we were under the curse of the Law; now we are under grace. Before we had no excuse; now we have all hope. Before there were only wrath and indignation and distress of soul; now there are adoption, reconciliation, and eternal life with God.

As we follow Paul's example of presenting the Gospel, we must first proclaim the sinfulness of man and the coming righteous judgment of God before we speak of justification through Christ. Paul has taken great pains to inform us of the depths of

our sin before he expounds on the greatness of Christ.

In Acts 10:42-43, Peter says, *“And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. 43Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”* Peter states that you must understand the justice of Christ before you can know the justification through Christ.

Last week, we considered three transitional statements that Paul makes:

1) Man Is Accountable to God; 2) Man Cannot Justify Himself; and 3) *But Now . . . Christ.*

I reminded you of a parable that Jesus taught where two debtors were forgiven their debts, one owing basically 500 denarii; the other, 5,000 denarii. Jesus asked the question, “Who will have more love for the one who forgave their debts?” The answer is the one who owed more. The lesson we learn is that the one who understands and knows the weight of his sin and the debt that he must pay will love Christ more than the one who thinks himself righteous.

We must grasp that the debt we owe is unfathomable and unpayable, but now we find there is One who is willing to pay our debt. So we come to the great transition in the book of Romans and in all of Scripture.

But now---this transition is not only the heart of Romans, but also it is the pivot and heart of the whole Bible. If you understand this transition, you will go far in grasping all of Scripture. Here we have a contrast between the revelation of the depths of sin of mankind and the power of God in the Gospel. Here the unfathomable, amazing, magnificent truth is revealed that God's own righteousness may be imputed to sinful man through faith in Christ.

Last week, I gave you a number of contrasts and reversals in Scripture that focus on the work of God . . . *But God.* I want to take a moment to show you some reversals and contrasts just in the book of Romans ---

Romans 5:8-9 says, *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.”*

Romans 6:22-23 *But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. 23For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Romans 6:17-18 *But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, 18and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.*

Romans 7:24 *Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?*

Romans 8:1 *Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Romans 11:30 *For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy.*

One pastor said that all of the sermons ever preached cannot adequately express the