

Lessons 1 & 2 --- October 19, 2017

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

Question 2 --- Discuss Paul's affections and desires for the people at the church in Rome. What can we learn from him?

That I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. Romans 1:12

This is an amazing statement made by an apostle. Paul verifies that there can be mutual encouragement between apostle and church. If this is the attitude of an apostle, how much more does this apply to an elder, a pastor, and a deacon in the church? There is mutual encouragement between church leader and other church members. We are all in process. I am amazed how much I learn as I interact with others in the church, even new believers.

A pastor spends much of his week ministering, counseling, and studying. He does not get to listen to or interact with other people as much as some do. There is a tremendous blessing to see the growth of believers as they hear the Word of God and apply it to their lives. For example, I remember my own thrill as I was first taught about God's sovereign election from Scripture. I am still thrilled to teach others that truth and see God turn on the lights in people's thinking, and then see how that truth grows them up in the faith. In that sense, the church becomes the preacher's pastor . . . encouraging him as he sees their growth.

God graciously uses me to speak the truth of His Word, but there is no distinction between you and me. Yes, the elders have to give an account for the souls of the church and you should give them honor, but never think that they are other than what they are, mere men.

I have a new saying, "There are no great men; there is only a great God who uses men." I believe that is what Paul meant when he said in 1 Corinthians 15:10 *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.*

Paul bookends who he is by the grace of God. 2 Corinthians 4:7 *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.* You are a clay pot holding the infinite treasure of the truth. It is God's truth that is great, not us.

Question 3 --- Briefly recap why God is just in judging all men as specified in these general groupings: a. Pagan Man 1:18-32; b. Moral Man 2:1-16; c. Religious Man 2:17-3:8.

In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul points to three types of sinful man; namely, Pagan Man, Moral Man, and Religious Man. Pagan Man as described in 1:18-32 actually portrays all of mankind, only there are those who think that they are a bit better than others because they are outwardly moral or religious. But all of mankind is defined by the descriptions found in chapter 1.

Romans 1:20-23 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

God has overwhelmingly displayed His power, glory, graciousness, and righteousness through creation and the conscience that He has placed within man. The problem is that, even though mankind is well aware of God, man suppresses the truth about God and exchanges the truth for a lie. As a result, God gives man over to all kinds of sinful consequences.

Romans 1:26-27 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

Romans 2:8-9 describes the coming judgment of mankind by God, *“To those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. 9There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek.”*

God ultimately gives man over to a depraved mind which is delineated in Romans 1:28-32 *And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, 30slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.*

It is only as you grow in your understanding that these descriptions of man's sin nature in verses 29-32 apply to you specifically— evil, wicked, greedy, murderous, haters of God, without understanding, etc.— will you grow. It is only as you are convinced that these descriptions are indicative of your heart and your nature will you deepen your understanding and appreciation of what Christ has done for you on the Cross.

The Bible teaches that man is dead in his trespasses and sin. There is nothing good in man that would attract God to him. As I said before, we must understand the total depravity, the depths of man's sin, in order to grasp rightly the magnificence of the grace of God.

Next, Paul addresses some of mankind who actually think that they are better than others. They fall under the label of Moral Man. They clean up the outside, but in reality their hearts are no different than the basest of men. Romans 2:1 *Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.*

This describes Moral Man, who looks good on the outside but whose heart is truly dark. The condition of the heart of man has always been the issue with God. The outward appearance can mask the depravity of the heart. Jesus said in Matthew 15:18-20, *But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. 19For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. 20These are the things which defile the man.* So Moral Man is no better than Pagan Man.

Paul ends with describing Religious Man by pointing to the Jews of his day. Religious Man goes a step further than Moral Man in that he is engaged in all kinds of religious activities, so he thinks that he is right with God. The equivalent today would be the mentality of not just other world religions, like Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Catholicism, but even of biblical Christianity.

There are those who have been raised in the church, who think by virtue of being attached to the church that they are okay with God. They point to their baptism, their confirmation, their giving to the church, their membership, their reading of the Bible--all or any one of these--to show that they are okay with God.

Paul used the example of circumcision for the Jews as an action that would save a Jew from the judgment of God. Paul states that the issue is the heart, not the outward activity. Romans 2:28-29 *For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.* So Religious Man is no better than Pagan Man. The covering of sinful flesh must be cut away from the soul of man, and the Holy Spirit must give a new heart and new life.

I cannot say enough how important it is that you have a growing knowledge of what the Bible teaches about the depths of depravity in all of mankind, which would include each one of us. I do not particularly like to meditate on what the Bible says about the darkness of my heart, and yet it forms an important basis for understanding the grace of God.

Question 5 --- Summarize man's bankruptcy before God. What difference(s) does knowing this truth make in our lives?

1) Man is Morally Bankrupt; 2) Man's Mind is Bankrupt; 3) Man is Spiritually Bankrupt.

First, we see that mankind is morally void: *There is none righteous, not even one.* In fact, the Bible states that our attempts at morality in comparison to God's glory are actually counterproductive. Isaiah 64:6 *For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*

What hinders our ability to rightly evaluate our condition before God is that we compare ourselves to ourselves and not to God's perfect standard. We see that some people are better than others in our horizontal existence, but we fail to evaluate ourselves by the standard of God Himself. We think that our righteousness is of the same nature as God's righteousness, which is not true. God's righteousness is categorically otherworldly than ours.

Second, we saw that *no one understands.* Man's Mind is Bankrupt. Sin took a devastating toll on the mind of man. This refers to an absence of truth receptors, not just a lack of human knowledge. Obviously man has gained knowledge and understanding in many things pertaining to our existence. But when it comes to the truth about God, man is totally in the dark.

1 Corinthians 1:18-21 speaks to man being in the dark. *For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE." 20Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.*

Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 2:14 *But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.* God's wisdom is foolishness to man and he cannot understand eternal truths from God.

For example, there are all kinds of sound waves in this room that our ears do not pick up. But if you turn on a radio, you will hear music, news, sports, and all kinds of entertainment. They are there; you just do not have the receptors. So it is with the truth of God. Natural man does not have the spiritual receptors and he cannot understand spiritual matters on his own.

Lastly, we saw that *no one seeks after God*. Man Is Spiritually Bankrupt. The temples and idols that are so prolific in India, China, and other nations are not indications of man searching for God. Instead, they are monuments of man's rejection of God and of his attempts to erect his own religion. In many of these religions, you find perversion and a reflection of the depraved, twisted minds of man. In ancient civilizations, there were temple prostitutes, male and female, who were supposedly part of worship to the gods.

We have to remove from our thinking the idea that, when mankind speaks about God apart from Christ, men are really seeking after God. They are not seeking for God; none seek for God. When Adam sinned, he ran away from God, not towards God for reconciliation. And mankind continues to run away.