

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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And be Thankful

November 26, 2023

Sermon Text: Romans 1:16-25

Scripture Reading: Colossians 3:1-17

This morning, because it is the Thanksgiving season, I wanted to call your attention to the first chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans and consider this matter of *giving thanks to God*.

If you have been following the Romans mid-week Bible study, you know that we have been looking at that chapter and have seen how vital it is for us all to understand the doctrines set out there. I suppose in many ways it could be said that this is one of the

most important chapters of the Bible. Without knowing what Paul says here, we simply cannot understand the fundamental essence of sin, nor why mankind is what it is, nor why this world is as it is, why God's condemnation is upon that "moral nice fellow" that you know. And much of the answer to these issues concerns this matter of *the giving or the withholding of thankfulness to God*. Perhaps someone might even be listening to this message this morning who regard themselves as being quite good, as being without question acceptable to God, when in fact they are under His just and righteous wrath.

Follow along then and hear the Word of God:

Rom 1:16-25 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the

power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (17) For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

(18) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

(19) For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. (20) For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

(21) For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

(22) Claiming to be wise, they became fools, (23) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and

birds and animals and creeping things.

(24) Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, (25) because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Be Thankful for the Gospel

Rom 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (17) For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

As we proceed through these verses, looking into the darkness of sin, *be thankful for verses 16-17*. As Lloyd-Jones puts it at the very end of his sermons on Romans 1,

“I do not know what you feel, my

friends, but I feel, as I say these things – Thank God for Romans 1:16-17 in the light of all this....What else could have saved any one of us from such a condition and from such a hell. Thank God for it. And thank God that He has opened our eyes to see it.” [Romans, Vol 1, Lloyd Jones, Banner of Truth Trust]

I will be sharing more of what Lloyd-Jones has to say on this final section of chapter one this coming week in the Romans study.

And be thankful! Be thankful for the Lord Jesus Christ. Be thankful for this righteousness which is from Him, which is not anything in us nor due to anything we do or do not do. Be thankful that God has given us so great a salvation in His Son.

Alright then, let's move to Paul's exposure of this darkness of sin-

Rom 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

All mankind, as we enter this world, is under the condemnation of God. God's wrath is upon the sinner – if you are in Christ now, there was a time when you were not and when you were a child of wrath. God's wrath *is being revealed* against man's *ungodliness*. That is, against man's rejection of God Himself. Against man's hostility toward God and rebellion against the first 4 commandments (the first table of the Law). His hatred of “you shall have no other gods before Me.”

Further, God's wrath is being revealed moment by moment against man's *unrighteousness*. That is, against man's rejected of the next 6 commandments. Paul describes this at the end of this chapter-

Rom 1:29-31 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, (30) slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful,

inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, (31) foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Who Suppress the Truth

Paul now moves in closer to the heart or essence of man's sin. He says that in his wickedness, man *suppresses the truth*. What is that truth which is so hateful to man that he expends tremendous energy constantly to hold it down, like a powerful spring that has to be compressed constantly lest it spring up into view? What is this truth? It is this:

Rom 1:19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

What can be known about God. Knowledge of God which is plain and obvious to all men because God has shown it to them. What then is this knowledge? What is it about Himself that God has plainly shown to all men? Paul lays it out in a very logical and orderly sequence:

Rom 1:20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Do you see it? This plain truth which the invisible God has made plainly visible to us all is this:

That God is GOD. That He is eternal and omnipotent, that He is divine in nature – that is, He is not a creature, He is not like us, and that WE are not God.

And how did/does God reveal this truth about Himself? *Through the creation which He has made.*

Psa 19:1-6 To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. (2) Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. (3) There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. (4) Their voice goes out through all the earth, and

their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, (5) which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. (6) Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

You see it then? Every human being has access to this general revelation of God through the creation. As John Calvin points out in his commentary on Ephesians, God's existence, His eternity, His divinity is most clearly seen in the creation when we are driven to say, "I don't know." We can describe what we see happening in the creation – seeds sprouting, leaves forming, animals recreating, gravity pulling, planets orbiting – but we can never answer "why?" And Calvin notes that this "why" drives us back to the only answer possible – *God*. God is doing it.

Col 1:16-17 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or

rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. (17) And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

We must all ask ourselves this searching question – *Does the creation drive me to acknowledge and give thanks to God? If you took science classes in school, did your studies of creation cause you to keep asking "why?" and turn your thoughts to God? Or did you not even acknowledge Him in the process and instead boast of your own knowledge of science and data?*

Listen carefully – *"so they are without excuse."* We stand accountable before God. He has plainly revealed Himself to everyone in the creation. No one has an excuse for not knowing that God exists and that He is God, our Creator and Sustainer. But most likely as you went through school, very few or none of the teachers and professors ever mentioned God. They described the mathematical orderliness of the

universe, they helped you examine the structures of living things, they taught you about the amazing structure of crystals, the properties of the water molecule...the incredible coding of DNA – but never or almost never was glory given to God.

And now we get right down to it-

The Essence of Sin

Rom 1:21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

This is the evil heart of sin. The core of it. This is *sin*, not *sins* as in a list. Those *sins* are the result of *sin*. And this *sin* is

...knowing God to be God, knowing that man is to honor God as God, knowing that man owes God thanksgiving for everything, and yet refusing to do so.

What is the chief end of man? *To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.*

But man does neither.

The essence of sin is living one's life as if God were irrelevant. Knowing that God is God, knowing that He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and yet just blowing Him off as nothing.

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him...

There it is. And this is why that nice, moral, helpful, hard-working neighbor of yours is *under the wrath of God moment by moment by moment, day after day after day. It is why he or she will end in hell except they repent of this heinous sin.*

Unthankfulness. There it is. Refusal to honor God. Refusal to acknowledge Him as God.

Hos 2:6-8 Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. (7) And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not

overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now. (8) For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal.

Hab 1:15-16 He brings all of them up with a hook; he drags them out with his net; he gathers them in his dragnet; so he rejoices and is glad. (16) Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet; for by them he lives in luxury, and his food is rich.

Here are some comments by Charles Hodge from the Old Princeton days:

“In the constitution of their own nature, and in the works of creation, man actually possesses an intelligible revelation of the Divine existence and perfections....But they did not reverence and worship God as their God; neither did they refer to him the blessings which they daily received at His hands.”

[Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Charles Hodge, Eerdmans]

Harvest grain and wine and oil – then offer them to Baal. Catch fish with a net, then worship the net. That is this refusal to honor God as God and give Him thanks. The heart of sin.

The world today is the same. Men and women living their lives, enjoying the many blessings from God’s hand, having a plain and clear revelation of God as God shouting at them every moment of every day, and yet they willfully suppress that truth. They put God out of their minds. They hate any form of His “invasion” into their thoughts. This is why the sinner will very quickly spurn you or turn the topic quickly to a worldly subject when you try to speak to them about Christ.

What is the inevitable result of this refusal to honor and give thanks to God? It is this:

“but they became futile in their

thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

Paul now begins to show us the terrible consequence of this suppression of the truth. He will develop it further through the expression “God gave them over,” but we have that subject beginning right here.

When man refuses to acknowledge the truth about God which God has clearly revealed to him, when he refuses to honor and glorify God as God, his mind and his affections increasingly become foolish and blind.

That is to say, when the sinner persists in rejecting God, in refusing to acknowledge God as God, *he becomes increasingly unable to see this truth God has clearly revealed.* This is why talking to the sinner about Christ leaves you so often feeling like you are talking to a deaf and blind man.

This increase of spiritual darkness which results from rejecting God continues down this path:

Rom 1:22-25 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, (23) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (24) Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, (25) because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

The Height of Foolishness - Idolatry

Here then is the source of all false religion – and all human beings who reject God’s truth embrace it – *idolatry*. Notice the universality of it. Everyone has a god. If not the true God, then an idol god. And idolatry is madness.

The ever-present attitude of the idolater is this – he claims to be wise.

Rev 2:24 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden.

Christ is being sarcastic here to expose the foolishness of idolaters who boast about knowing “deep things.” In fact, idolatry and its secret initiations is always, in fact, Satanic. Demonic.

The foolish insanity to which the idolater is given over to is so plainly stated by Isaiah –

Isa 44:14-20 He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. (15) Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. (16) Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms

himself and says, “Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!” (17) And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for you are my god!” (18) They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. (19) No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, “Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?” (20) He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?”

Listen to this insane “exchange” once more which the sinner boasts about:

Rom 1:23-25 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping

things. (24) Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, (25) because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

This is what man does. He hates the knowledge of the true God which has been so clearly revealed to him, he hates it so much that he not only constantly pushes it down, working to remain blind to it, that he works a great “trade.” He exchanges it for that which is a lie. Truth for a lie. That is what he does. That is what idolatry is. It is a lie.

You see it then. The essence of sin. Refusing to honor God. Refusing to give Him thanks, refusing to glorify Him, and embracing instead a god of man’s own creation.

And do not miss this – *the thing is universal*. If you do not know Christ, if you have not been born again, this is the thing you are doing. It is as true of that “good”

moral neighbor of yours as it is of the serial killer. Each has exchanged the truth for a lie. Each has carved out his own god.

Go into the most beautiful, rich, ornate cathedral you can find today. Filled with statues and art. Complete with priests in robes, processions and rituals. What is it? It is the worship of a lie. Of an idol created by man.

And all who embrace such things and persist in them have been *judicially hardened by God*. Three times Paul says “God gave them up.” To what? To impurity. To the lusts of their hearts. To a debased mind that is incapable of seeing truth.

This is man in his sin. It is a hopeless condition:

Eph 2:1-3 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (2) in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— (3) among

whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

infernally gospel is always to be found – *you shall be as god.*

Ask yourself – *do you acknowledge God? Do you honor Him? Do you thank Him? Or are you living your life as if He were irrelevant?* If so, you are guilty of the fundamental basis of sin, and the wrath of God is being revealed right now, moment by moment, against you. This is the Broadway road which ends in hell.

Unless....

Rom 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Let's each one examine ourselves very, very carefully in regard to these things. The lie is extremely deceptive – its author is Satan who is the father of lies. And his masterpiece lie is the counterfeit religion he creates in which his