

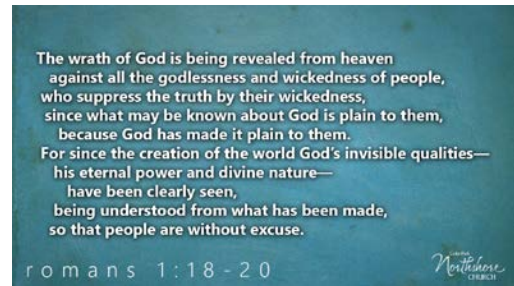
Righteousness Lost

In this, our second message in our new series from the Book of Romans, we come upon some *tough passages*. And, the way I have it outlined, we are going to take on a *big chunk...* picking up where we left off last week in the middle of chapter 1, and going to the middle of chapter 3.



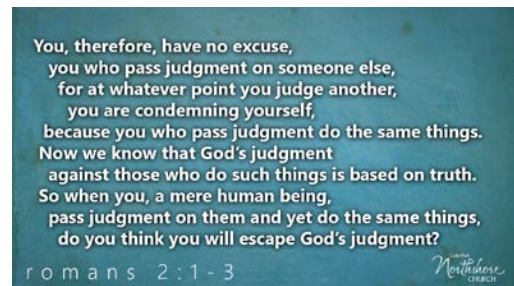
Let's stand and read a few of these verses together. First from chapter 1, verses 18-20

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness,¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.¹



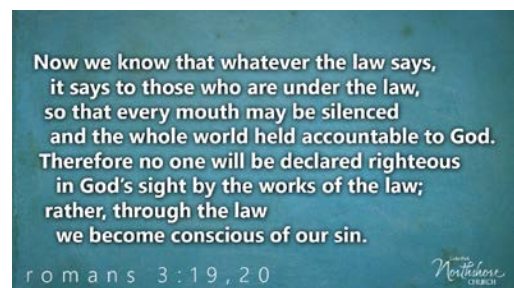
From chapter 2, verses 1-3

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.² Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.³ So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?²



From chapter 3, verses 19-20

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.³



¹ The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 1:18–20). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

² The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 2:1–3). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 3:19–20). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

This extended passage of scripture is about **righteousness**... more specifically how we humans don't have it. We, on our own merits, from God's perspective, are without righteousness.

How is that for an uplifting, encouraging message today? We all stink! We are rotten and without righteousness! Aren't you glad you came to church today? Now, if you are just visiting today, checking Northshore out to see if this might be the church for you... hold on... don't storm out just yet.

We aren't in a habit of wagging our fingers at folk. Generally, I find that people don't need to be reminded just how crummy we are.

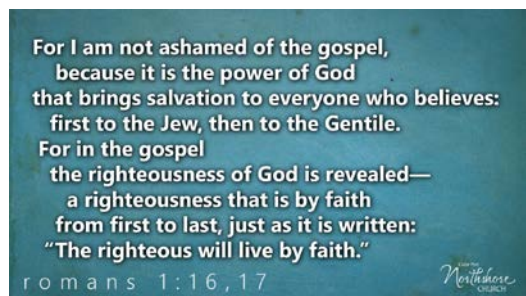
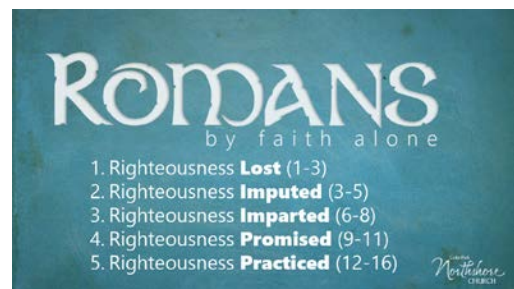
And we find that in The Book of Romans, the Apostle Paul doesn't spend the whole time dwelling on just how crummy we humans are... but it is a vitally important part of the argument Paul makes for righteousness in the Book of Romans.

Here is how I see the outline of Romans in big chunks.

1. Righteousness Lost (1-3)
2. Righteousness Imputed (3-5)
3. Righteousness Imparted (6-8)
4. Righteousness Promised (9-11)
5. Righteousness Practiced (12-16)

There is a great deal of hope in the 4 sections (and 10 sermons) that follow in Romans... but we do need to establish this foundational principle: no one is righteous. No one meets God's standard of holiness. No one adequately respond to God's revelation... His written revelation proclaimed in Scripture, or his demonstrated revelation in creation.

After stating the thesis of Romans in verse 17, that "the righteous will live by faith", it is as if Paul is saying "Hear ye, hear ye, court is now in session... the holy and righteous Judge of All Creation is presiding." Romans 1:18 is the door that leads us into God's courtroom.



The theme of Romans is the righteousness of God; but Paul had to begin with the unrighteousness of humans. These passages clarify how far we humans are from the righteousness our holy God demands.



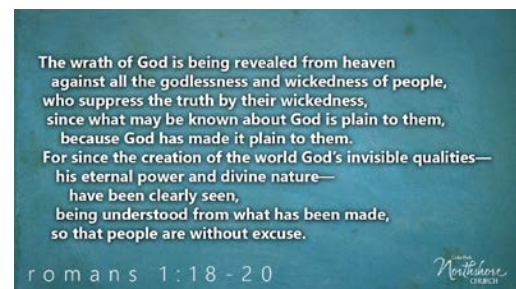
There are certainly some more righteous than others...but even the most righteous of mankind are so very far from God. The only righteousness that can get us to God is the righteousness that God provides.

This passage breaks into three simple pieces that make Paul's argument. The charges are applied liberally... all are guilty.

- Gentiles are Guilty
- Jews are Guilty
- All are Guilty

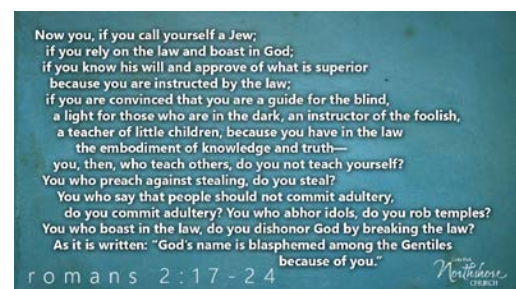


The first charge is to the Gentiles. All mankind is without an excuse. God is plainly revealed in all of creation. When we look around us we plainly see His work. When we look within ourselves we sense that God is real. There is no reason at all, no excuse, to deny God's authority.



The second charge is to the Jews, the historical people of God. Listen to more of what Paul had to say to the religious:

¹⁷ Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; ¹⁸ if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; ¹⁹ if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—²¹ you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."²² You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who



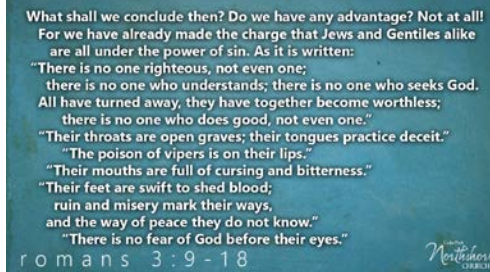
abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? ²⁴ As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” ^o ⁴

In the first charge, Paul proclaims that those who didn’t have the law were condemned anyway... because God’s revelation of Himself is beyond the law. Now Paul turns to those who had the law, the Jews, and makes the case that merely having the law did not make the individual Jew any better. In fact, those who have the law will be condemned according to it.

The third charge is comprehensive... to all people.

He turns to the Scripture, stringing together passages from the Psalms and the Prophets:

⁹ What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. ¹⁰ As it is written:



What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written:
“There is no one righteous, not even one;
there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.
All have turned away, they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good, not even one.”
“Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.”
“The poison of vipers is on their lips.”
“Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”
“Their feet are swift to shed blood;
ruin and misery mark their ways,
and the way of peace they do not know.”
“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”
romans 3:9-18

“There is no one righteous, not even one;

¹¹ there is no one who understands;
there is no one who seeks God.

¹² All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.” ^p

¹³ “Their throats are open graves;
their tongues practice deceit.” ^q

“The poison of vipers is on their lips.” ^r

¹⁴ “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” ^s

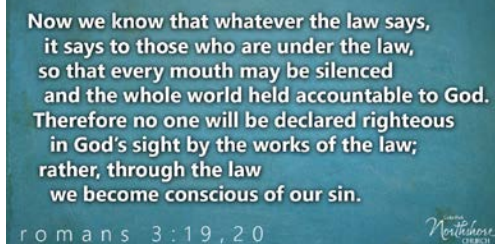
¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood;

¹⁶ ruin and misery mark their ways,

¹⁷ and the way of peace they do not know.” ^t

¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” ^u

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. ⁵



Now we know that whatever the law says,
it says to those who are under the law,
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rather, through the law
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romans 3:19,20

⁴ The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 2:17–24). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 3:9–20). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The Apostle Paul closes his argument, proclaiming that anyone who thinks they can attain righteousness on their own are sadly mistaken.

But now for the rest of Romans we'll see that there is righteousness to be had... not from us, but from God.

- A free gift from God (imputed).
- To be worked out with the Holy Spirit (imparted).

When it comes to righteousness, I want to talk to you about four kinds of people today... I'll let you decide into which category you best fit.

Sometimes it helps me to think in terms of a grid... so I'm going to draw you one today.

- A 2X2 grid
- Across the top, our behavior
- Down the side, our faith



In a moment I'll have everyone stand up and arrange yourselves accordingly here in the auditorium... I want to know who is who. Just kidding, that's not the point. But hold on with me for a few moments... I think this is worth thinking about.

Let's start in the upper left... the good, faithful person. Your basic church-goin' type... believing in Christ and living a pretty good life.

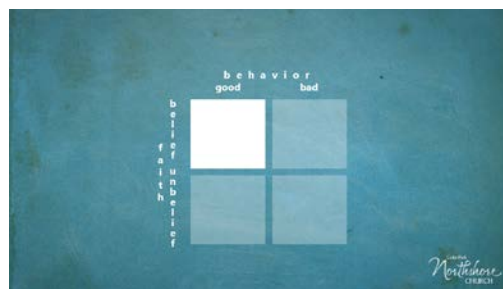
Congratulations...

But watch out for the trap.

Watch out that we don't get side-tracked with a narrow focus on our little acts of righteousness.

And watch that you don't get caught up focusing on one area of behavior, while overlooking others. We do that when we are looking in the mirror, and we do that when we are looking at others.

For example... Romans 1 talks about sexual sin, specifically homosexual depravity. Homosexuality is identified as sin in Romans 1... but that is by no means the main point. Maybe that isn't anywhere near your problem...



but what about the others listed right along with sexual sin, including envy, greed, and malice?

Moving on...

The next box is for the person who has truly believed... but isn't at all pleased with the level of obedience. We've entered into this relationship with Christ... but we can't shake the sin-habit.



- We know what we ought to do, and we don't do it.
- We know what we should not do, and we do do it.

Sound familiar?

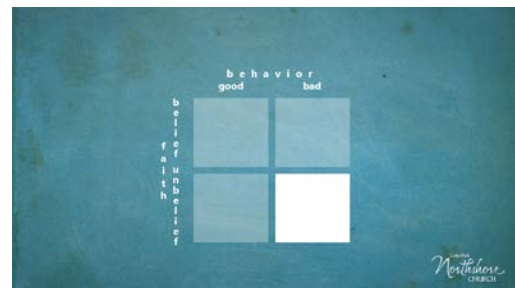
Maybe you've decided that you just can't be good enough. Well, you're right.

But once coming to faith, we need to watch out for another trap... confusing conviction with condemnation. The Holy Spirit convicts, the Enemy condemns.

Stick with us over the weeks and we'll get to more help in Romans to **practice** this **promised** righteousness.

Continuing around the box...

What about those who are living rotten lives, and deny God? Is that anybody here today? Anyone want to admit it? If that is you, I'm glad you're here.



The truth of the matter is... such a person is in a terrible place. But, if that is you, God loves you! And he has provided a way out. We do not need to live there. The Gospel is true and you can believe. You can do this!

And Finally...

It could be that the most dangerous place to be is in this final quadrant... the good person who is trying to go-it-alone without God.



If that is you, I commend you for your goodness... but your goodness could be, in some sense, your worst enemy.

Every once in a while you'll see in a pop business book some kitchy phrase like: "The good is the enemy of the best." Human nature will often let us settle for "good enough." Our "good enough" is not even close to the righteousness God desires.

It is one thing to repent of our sin... but often an even more difficult task to repent of our righteousness. It is one thing to think that were so bad that God can love us... but an even darker place, really, to think that we are good enough and don't need God. Both are lies.

It is really this quadrant that is the target of today's passage from Romans, the ones who are satisfied with our righteousness apart from God. Whether it is a religious righteousness like the Jews of Paul's day, or some other man-made righteousness like the Gentiles of Paul's day. Only the righteousness that comes from faith in God is of any true good.

So which box do you fit in?

Often times I find myself somewhere overlapping all four in the middle.

"Lord I believe; help my unbelief."

I'm on a journey that is changing my heart and my behavior every day. There is a bit of a continuum... gray areas from one box to the other.



But there seems to be a binary component as well. A simple switch.

Do we choose God or does God choose us? Yes.

Do we seek God or does God seek us? Yes.

Is this all God's work or do we play some part? Yes.

And the part we play is to embrace God.
To believe the Gospel.

To take this key verse in Romans as the
key to our eternity.

Believe this... and pursue righteousness.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel,
because it is the power of God
that brings salvation to everyone who believes:
first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.
For in the gospel
the righteousness of God is revealed—
a righteousness that is by faith
from first to last, just as it is written:
“The righteous will live by faith.”

romans 1:16, 17

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