

Session 6 — Al Mohler
March 6, 2014 — 7:00 p.m.

ROMANS 1:16-32

There are some passages in Scripture that are focal points that require us to come back to them again and again.

If we read Rom. 1:16, we fail to recognize how radical that message is! The oneness we have is a oneness that is accomplished in Christ and for the church.

It is interesting the way Paul begins, “I’m not ashamed of the gospel...” Why would he begin that way? Because the Greco-Roman culture was an honor culture. To be ashamed was the worst thing that could happen to anyone. There is not a bit of shame in the gospel — for either the Jew or the Greek. You can’t be ashamed as a Gospel preacher. There is no shame in the Gospel. People may scorn and mock you, but you cannot be shamed by preaching the Gospel.

The gospel is the power of God for salvation — it is the *saving* power of God.

How are the elect made manifest? They hear the gospel and believe. Through the preaching of the gospel is made clear, and hearing, they believe. There is priority to the Jew and yet also to the Gentile — the Greek. This is foundational. This one verse explains the Gospel, how the gospel saves, and who the gospel saves.

But Paul moves forward in v. 17 — the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. It is impossible to preach and teach the gospel without revealing what is in the gospel. In the gospel, God’s righteousness is demonstrated, which is exactly what Paul argues in ch. 3. This phrase in the context of the gospel means it is made ours — it is an alien righteousness. He is just and the justifier for the one who has faith in Jesus. Whose righteousness is sufficient? It is His imputed righteousness which saves.

We preach justification by faith *alone*.

In the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed (v. 18). But also, the wrath of God to come is also revealed. If we are preaching the gospel, we are also preaching the wrath of God. If we preach good news, it is good news only because there is bad news. The wrath of God is revealed. And it is revealed from Heaven against unrighteous beings who suppress the truth.

Verse 18 tells us of a universal human conspiracy. How do we understand the headlines and news that unfold before us? How do we understand the vast moral revolution around us and what we are not hearing in so many pulpits around us? Humanity is involved in a massive conspiracy to suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness. This is the noetic effect of the Fall. You cannot understand the Fall until you understand the noetic effect — our ability to think and reason is corrupted by the Fall. Even though our minds continue to operate, we lie to one

another and still believe one another. These are sins against knowledge, truth, and reason. Why is this important? Because it is key to understanding humanity, why Christ came and why He had to die, and it is key to understanding the headlines.

Notice all the mental, rational, cognitive acts in the following verses: this is the noetic effect of the Fall. We do not think rightly. We do not understand what we see right before our eyes. Every human being knows God even if they do not honor Him or give thanks to Him. In the entire created order, God has revealed Himself. And the world does not understand it. The problem is not with the revelation; it is with the perceiver. We refuse to see what is right before our eyes. And furthermore, we have spiritual cataracts and instead of seeing the attributes of God in creation, we will look at it and refuse to see what it is. And the extent of the noetic effect of the Fall is to every other characteristic of our minds: our memory, our rationale, logical arguments, why we see prospectively with prejudice, why we are confused and befuddled, and why we can convince ourselves that what is false is true and what is true is false.

They became fools (v. 22).

No one is left with an excuse. No one has an excuse.

These verses tell us why there are so many who do not believe and will not believe the gospel. We suppress the truth in unrighteousness. What is that? We give ourselves to sin so that we gain comfort in our sin and become more comfortable with sinners. We are attempting to insulate ourselves against the righteousness, which convicts us. Where does that lead?

The apostle Paul gives us a classic example of Greco-Roman rhetoric. We have two things said three times in this passage.

1. The word *exchange* is found three times (vv. 23, 25, 26-27).

When Paul by the Holy Spirit is trying to tell us why we need Christ, he means that when God tells us what we need, we do not want it or accept it. What does it mean to be wise and become a fool? It means to exchange the glory of God for the horrifying “glory” of an image. If we had only this one image, it would be enough. It’s good to be evil and evil to be good — that’s an insanity that is difficult to conceive, but it is mentioned here three times.

When we think of the moral corruption around us, we think first of vv. 26-27, but when we think of this verse, we should recognize that there are two exchanges that took place before this exchange — the exchanges of truth and worship (idolatry). The cataclysmic evidence that Paul would have us see of exchange is homosexuality. The *only explicit* reference to female homosexuality in the ancient world (extra-biblical literature included) is given here. This exchange is a deadly, sinful pattern for those who have eyes to see.

Is Paul saying that homosexuals are a separate class of sinners? No. Paul is speaking of all humanity. He is not holding up a picture of “them,” but of we ourselves who are all involved in this conspiracy to rationalize sin and suppress truth. And we are *all* involved in that process.

Three times *exchange* is used. In the first exchange it reemphasizes that we misread nature. We read the “is” as an “ought.” In other words, in Eden, it would have been right to see the “is” as an “ought.” The things that operated in the natural world operated as they should have. But that is not true in the wilderness. The third exchange tells us that what we do is unnatural. Sin is itself unnatural. And there are certain sins that are committed against nature. What we are told is that it is not only a violation of the moral law of God but also against the natural law of God and the need for another who is not the same.

We need to be very thankful that sin does not have full reign. We still have some intelligence and some memory. But lest we feel morally superior this passage helps us understand that this is a reality — and how intent and ingenious unrighteous men are for their sin — they are desperately wicked. And who are those people? We are those people! There is not one of us who has an excuse.

2. Three times *God gave them over* (vv. 24, 26, 28)

It’s hard to imagine words of judgment more severe than these. God is not a passive judge. He is an active judge and He is proactive in giving people over to judgment. He says that if that is the way they want to live in it, He will let them have it. There is a finality to this. Except for the Savior.

God is not waiting to see if we will sin; it’s already happened. This passage is Genesis 3. This is a picture of fallen humanity. And that is exactly why Paul says he is not ashamed of the gospel — it is the power of salvation.

This moral revolution is not going to stop. And the only answer is Jesus. He is the only rescue. What is being demonstrated here is the power of the gospel to save.

This makes us cling to the gospel. There is no shame in the gospel. It is the power of God unto salvation...

All we’ve got is the message of the gospel and it’s all we need.