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Sermon Notes

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Our Greatest Danger & Our Only Salvation: The Righteousness of God

Romans 1:16-17

Romans 1:16-17 "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, 'The righteous will live by faith.'"

I. Last Week

- A. The Gospel of God: Occasion for Shaming, Power to Withstand It
- B. The Gospel of God: Supernatural Power for Complete Salvation
- C. "For the Jew first, then for the Gentile"

II. Our Greatest Problem: The Righteousness of God

Key question: "Salvation from what?"

Piper's mis-translation: "For in the gospel the love of God is revealed..."

Certainly the gospel DOES reveal God's love!! **Romans 5:8 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."**

Piper: God can't simply sweep our unrighteousness under the rug... The love of God is also a holy love: It's not some sentimental feeling... "I feel nice towards you, I will now be nice towards you!" If so, Romans would have been a lot shorter, and we could have skipped the gruesome story of the death of the Son of God.

- A. The Holiness of God
 - 1. Central attribute of God

Isaiah 6:1-5 *In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” ⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ⁵ “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”*

2. Holiness = separation
 - a. separation from all of creation
 - b. separation from evil

Habakkuk 1:13 *“Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, you cannot tolerate wrong.”*

3. God’s hatred of evil: why we depend on it
 - a. suppose God didn’t hate evil with a perfect hatred
 - b. suppose he tolerated Hitler, Stalin, Mao Zedong
 - c. God would be evil Himself.. the universe a terrifying place
4. God’s hatred of evil... why it threatens us eternally

Romans: Simple reason... we are ourselves ungodly!!

B. The Ungodliness of Humanity: Romans 1-3

Romans 1:18 *“The wrath of God is being revealed against all the ungodliness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”*

Romans 3:10 *“There is no one righteous, not even one...”*

Created in the image of God, we rejected His glory and His sovereign rule over us and rebelled. We continue to rebel daily

C. The Coming Judgment: “Under God’s Wrath”

Romans 2:8 *“For those who are self-seeking, who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.”*

Romans 2:5 “Because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath when His righteous judgment will be revealed.”

John 3:36 “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.

[Jesus] *John 3:18 “Whoever does not believe in the Son stands condemned already...”*

Matthew 10:28 “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

21st century Americans grossly underestimate the holiness of God and His righteous anger against their sins... they say they will “take their chances” on Judgment Day, not realizing that they will have to give an account for every careless word they have spoken

Therefore, our greatest danger is the righteousness of God!!

III. Our Only Salvation: The Revealed Righteousness of God

This is why the GOSPEL is GOOD NEWS!!!

A. Martin Luther’s Struggle

Preface to Luther’s Latin Writings, Wittenberg, 1545: *I greatly longed to understand Paul’s Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, “the justice of God ” because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant. Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that “the just shall live by his faith.” Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the “justice of God”*

had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven. . . . [translated by Roland Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 49-50]

B. Augustine's Discovery

1. Augustine, enslaved by passion & lust... could not escape
2. Made a startling discovery
 - a. God commands sexual purity

Romans 13:14 “Not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

- b. Through the Gospel, God gives the very righteousness He commands

[from Augustine's Confessions, Book X, Chapter 29 NPNF 1:153]

And my whole hope is only in your exceeding great mercy. Give what You command, and command whatever You will. You impose sexual purity upon us, “Nevertheless, I when I perceived,” said someone, “that I could not otherwise obtain her, except God gave her me;... that was a point of wisdom also to know whose gift she was. . . . O charity, my God, kindle me! You command sexual purity; give what You command, and command what You wilt.

Note: A certain monk named Pelagius heard about this statement by Augustine and was outraged... he believed in the basic goodness and morality of man, and felt that if god commanded us to do something, it was up to us alone to do it

I believe that monk, Pelagius, has missed the central idea of Romans 1-3... apart from God, we have no righteousness of our own... we are enslaved to sin and go on sinning forever... therefore, if God doesn't fulfill in us what He commands, we will never be righteous

God commands righteousness... absolute, perfect righteousness!

Matthew 5:48 “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

C. How the Gospel Saves Believers: Imputed Righteousness

1. What is the righteousness? Three possibilities

We already know it's not the righteousness of God as our judge by which he righteously sends us to hell... for in context, this righteousness is actually the power of God for our salvation!!!

- a. "righteousness of God" = how God vindicates His righteousness at the Cross, by putting Jesus to death in our place
- b. "righteousness of God" = how God declares us to be righteous, free from the guilt of all sin
- c. "righteousness of God" = how God works in us gradually, little by little, making us more and more holy in our actual experience

To some degree it's all three, but here, it's especially the second option!! The focus here is on the righteousness God gives us by which we are saved from His wrath on Judgment Day... imputed righteousness

2. What is "imputed righteousness?"

- a. "Righteousness of God"... a quality or attribute of God... perfect, holy in all regards, morally blameless

1 John 1:5 "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all."

- b. The "righteous person shall live by his faith"
- c. BUT what about Romans 3:10???

Romans 3:10 "There is no one righteous, not even one."

Key question: Where did the "righteous man" get his righteousness? Simply as a gift from God!! That is imputed righteousness

3. How it saves you: One clear verse, three images

- a. one verse: the eternal exchange

2 Corinthians 5:21 "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God."

Eternal exchange occurred at the Cross... Christ took your sin and guilt, and gave you His righteousness... without it, you will not be permitted into heaven

- b. picture #1: Filthy rags exchanged for a rich, holy tunic

Zechariah 3:1-5 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. ² The LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?” ³ Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. ⁴ The angel said to those who were standing before him, “Take off his filthy clothes.” Then he said to Joshua, “See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you.” ⁵ Then I said, “Put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood by.

c. picture #2: Filthy rags exchanged for the clothes of a dear son

Luke 15:20-24 So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

d. picture #3: Clean garments required at the feast

Matthew 22:11-14 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹² ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless. ¹³ “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴ “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Imputed righteousness is righteousness directly from God, given as a gift to anyone who will believe... it is like a rich robe of purity and holiness that God uses to cover His sinful children, if they simply believe

D. A Revealed Righteousness

vs. 17 “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is being revealed...”

1. Greek verb is present continuous... the righteousness of God is now in the process of being revealed

2. “revealed”... same word used in Book of Revelation... “Apokaluptetai...”
 - a. we would know nothing of this righteousness if it hadn’t been revealed
 - b. it cannot be understood from looking at Creation
 - c. God must reveal it to us, or we’ll never see it
3. How... “in the Gospel”
 - a. whenever the gospel is preached, God unveils this gift of righteousness
 - b. blind eyes suddenly see both the need for perfect holiness, their own sinfulness, of the fact that God will simply give you His righteousness

Through the foolishness of preaching a miracle occurs... the righteousness of God is suddenly revealed to sinners and they receive it...

But how do they receive it... simply by faith

IV. “From faith to faith”

vs. 17 “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is being revealed, a righteousness from faith to faith...”

A. God’s righteousness simply comes to those with faith

Romans 3:21-22 “But now a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

Philippians 3:9 “...that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my which comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—a righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”

B. Justification by faith alone... apart from works

C. Faith is a gift from God... it comes from hearing the message

1. If the righteousness comes from God as a gift to the helpless
2. And if the helpless must have faith to receive it

3. Then faith is part of the gift

Ephesians 2:8-9 “For by grace you are saved through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is a gift from God, not by works so that no one can boast.”

4. Romans even goes so far as to tell us HOW FAITH COMES

Romans 10:17 “Faith comes from hearing the message about Christ...”

Illus. Software... CD-ROM with software necessary to play it

D. “From faith to faith”... different interpretations

1. Church fathers: “from the faith of the law to the faith of the gospel”
2. Augustine: “from the faith of the preacher to the faith of the hearer”
3. Calvin: “from the faith of justification through the faith of daily sanctification to the faith of final glorification”

Calvin’s Commentary on Romans 1:17: [Paul] says now, **from faith**; for righteousness is offered by the gospel, and is received by faith. And he adds, **to faith**: for as our faith makes progress, and as it advances in knowledge, so the righteousness of God increases in us at the same time, and the possession of it is in a manner confirmed. When at first we taste the gospel, we indeed see God’s smiling face turned towards us, but at a distance: the more the knowledge of true religion grows in us, by coming as it were nearer, we behold God’s favor more clearly and more familiarly.

NIV: “by faith from first to last...”

E. The Gospel is for BELIEVERS

1. Every step of salvation is by faith...
2. By faith we are justified and declared righteous by God
3. By faith we grow in actual holiness in life
4. By faith we will finish this life and be glorified

You must saturate yourself in the gospel... the gospel continues to give ongoing faith to those who continue to saturate themselves with its saving truth

V. “The Righteous Will Live by Faith”

vs. 17 “... as it is written, ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”

- A. Habakkuk 2:4... circumstances: God’s judgment on His ungodly nation
- B. Physical safety then, spiritual salvation in the future on Judgment Day
- C. Also testimony to what we just said... step by step, you grow by trusting God for your own holiness

Ongoing faith is required... therefore it is also provided!!!

1 Corinthians 15:1-2 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

Colossians 1:23 “... if you continue firm in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.”

Saving faith is given by God, therefore it will last for a lifetime... ongoing renewal of that faith is necessary and occurs by a constant hearing of the gospel message... “from faith to faith”!!

VI. Review and Application

- A. Our greatest problem: the righteousness of God
 - The perfect holiness of God
 - The complete unrighteousness of humanity
 - The coming wrath of Judgment Day
- B. Our only solution: the righteousness of God
 - Luther’s discovery... not the righteousness of God to judge, but the righteousness from God which He gives as a gift to all who believe this gospel
 - God’s righteousness clothes us perfectly... three images of rich robes
- C. The righteousness of God comes by Faith Alone

- “Revealed” by the preaching of the gospel
- While the gospel is being preached, faith springs up in the hearts of all those who are being called by God
- That righteousness will clothe perfectly on judgment day

D. “From faith to faith” “The righteous will live by faith”

- Faith begins the Christian life... by faith we are clothed in righteousness
- Faith also makes progress day by day in sanctification

Application:

- 1) Piper’s observation: Westminster Shorter Catechism: “What is the chief end of man?” “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever”
 Romans 1:16 “enjoy Him forever” [salvation... “eternal joy at God’s right hand”]
 Romans 1:17 “glorify God” [our righteousness is really HIS, and HIS ALONE!!!]
- 2) Turn your back on your own righteousness... never again speak as anything but a sinner saved by grace
- 3) Exult in the perfect robes of Christ that God put on you... see yourself as completely perfect, righteous in your standing before God
- 4) Go from faith to faith... trust that God will finish in you what He has begun... by faith, be sanctified, putting sin to death day by day, growing in holiness day by day
- 5) To the unbeliever: REPENT AND BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS!!!