

THE UGLINESS OF SIN

(Romans 3:9-20)

INTRODUCTION:

We are coming to the end of the first major section of the book of Romans. The theme of Romans, recall, is the Gospel of God or the Good News. The first section which began in 1:18 starts with the Bad News. Next week we will start the section on the Good News for Sinners. But first we must conclude that we all need of some good news.

On a sunny day in September one year, a stern-faced, plainly-dressed man stood on a street corner in the busy Chicago loop. As pedestrians hurried by on their way to lunch or to work, he would solemnly lift his right arm and pointing to the person nearest him, intone loudly the single word -- GUILTY!. Then without any change of expression, he would resume his still stance for a few moments before repeating the gesture. Then again, raising his arm, and pointing, he would solemnly pronounce GUILTY!

This had an annoying effect on some passers-by. It had an eerie effect on others. One man, exclaimed, "But how did he know?" No doubt others had similar thoughts

We all have the knowledge that we are guilty before God but our problem is that we suppress that knowledge. This point was mentioned at the beginning of this section.

(Rom 1:18 NKJV) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

“We suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” What truth do we suppress? We suppress the truth of God’s existence, power, and Godhead. Just think of the battle that rages in our day with evolution versus creationism. Just think about it. The dominant belief today is that this vast universe was created by a “Big Bang.” A condensed compacted dot of material somehow accidentally exploded and the stars were formed, the planets began rotating around the earth, and somehow life was thrown into the mix. Now this must have taken billions of years, but this is how the universe was created. Many would rather believe this lie than believe that God created all these things as a witness to his existence and power. Amazing how we suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

What other truth do we suppress? We suppress the truth that idolatry and immorality, especially sexual immorality, is evidence that God has turned us over to our sins. We not only suppress the truth that sexual activity outside of marriage of a man and a woman is sin, we flaunt it. We use sex to sell movies, toothpaste, and hamburgers. Amazing how we suppress the truth of God's existence in unrighteousness.

What other truth do we suppress? We suppress the truth that we will stand before God's judgment. Recall 2:3

(Rom 2:3 NKJV) And do you think this, O man..... that you will escape the judgment of God?

We deny that there is a judgment coming and think that we will escape it. It is amazing how we suppress the truth of God's coming judgment in unrighteousness.

What other truth do we suppress? We suppress the truth that we are all guilty and accountable to God.

There was a time when everyone in our society assumed that this verdict was true. But that's all changed in the last fifty years or so. Back in 1948 Christian author C. S. Lewis wrote a little essay called "God in the Dock". In that essay, Lewis observed ancient people approached God as an accused person approaches his or her judge. But in his generation (and in ours as well) the roles are reversed. Now we humans have set themselves up as the judge, and God is the one on trial. We demand that God give us an answer for evil and suffering in our world, with us on the bench and God in the docket.

Lewis is right: More people have contested God's verdict on the human race than any other verdict in human history.

EVEN THE JEWS ARE GUILTY

It is not only the non-religious and openly immoral persons who suppress the truth of their sinfulness and guilt it is also the moral and the religious. Take the Jews for example. In 2:17 through 3:8 Paul takes up the case against the Jews. His main point is to show that the religious Jew is guilty before God also.

Why did he separate them out as a special case? Well, Paul himself was a Jew. But more importantly he knew that the Jews didn't believe that they were as immoral as the Gentiles and they probably weren't. They did have some advantages, the chief one being that God has dealt directly with them in calling

them to be his people. He had given them the sign of this special covenant with them, the sign of circumcision. And very importantly they had been given the “oracles” of God, which is direct revelation of His commandments and promises. But in short the Jews also were in need of redemption. They also are in need of the good news of the gospel, because they are sinners also. They who thought that they were the teachers of others, themselves committed the same sins. They were trusting in the outward sign of circumcision rather than having a pure heart trusting in God’s mercy. In their history they many times did not believe God’s word to them, nor did they keep that word.

WE ARE ALL UNDER SIN

Paul concludes in 3:9 that we are all under sin.

(Rom 3:9 NKJV) What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

We are all under sin. What does it mean to be under sin? It means to be under the control of sin. Paul uses the phrase “I am carnal, sold unto sin” in chapter 7:14. We all are under the control of sin and under the load of sin.

Have you sensed the weight of sin in your life? Sin will weigh you down. This is what sin will do to you. It will weight you down and crush your spirits and your lives. It will seek to bring you under its control. Have you discovered this about sin?

Back in the day of knights, around 1315, there was a knight named Enguerrand de Saint Cloud of France. For seven long years this knight and his horse remained in their steel armor, day and night. What happened was that the knight's godfather had been hanged as a sorcerer and the knight was protesting this action. He vowed that neither he nor his horse would take off the heavy coat of armor until the victim's name was exonerated.

After seven years, King Philippe V, finally declared the executed man innocent, and the knight and beast removed their ponderous suits of armor. The gallant knight is to be admired for his willingness to endure this feat, but the poor animal did not know why life had suddenly become so unbearable.

We are all under the burden of sin and sometimes life gets unbearable. Sin will do that to us.

Something must break this control and lift this burden. And that something is the Gospel. This will be the message from 3:31 to the end of the book of Romans.

THE UGLINESS OF SIN

Paul concludes this section with drawing a picture of the ugliness of sin. He quotes several passages from the OT to show how ugly and how pervasive sin is in all of us. It is interesting to me that we try to look at the good in every person, or we should. But here we see God's view of persons. He sees the sin. His x-ray vision uncovers something very ugly in all of us!

Paul uses different parts of our body to paint this picture of our moral condition before God. He mentions our throat, our tongues, our lips, our mouths, our feet and our eyes. We are sinners through and through.

(Rom 3:12-18 NKJV) They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." {13} "Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; {14} "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." {15} "Their feet are swift to shed blood; {16} Destruction and misery are in their ways; {17} and the way of peace they have not known." {18} "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

"Their throat is an open tomb." If you could look down a person's throat you would look into the vital organs of a person. You would see the lungs and the stomach, but here you would see your heart. The Bible compares our throats to an open tomb. Now what do you find in an open tomb? You usually find a dead corpse. You find a rotting corpse. You find a stinking corpse. This is what sin looks like on the inside of us, a dead, stinking, rotten, decaying corpse. It is ugly!

"With their tongues they have practiced deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips." What is an asp? It is a snake. It is a poisonous, slimy, filthy snake. Sin makes our tongues and our lips look and act like snakes. As the snakes' tongue shoots in and out in an ugly manner so does our tongues when sin is in control. Sin makes our tongues and lips look and act like snakes. It is ugly!

"Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." Before I was saved I had a very foul mouth, out of which came both cursing and bitterness. But here it is more than saying 'bad words.' The word "cursing" carries the idea of desiring the worst for a person by open criticism and public defamation. Bitterness describes openly-expressed emotional hostility toward someone. Out of the bitterness of the

heart flows the cursing of the mouth. David describes a person like this in Psalm 64:3-4: **“They sharpen their tongues like swords and aim their words like deadly arrows. They shoot from ambush at the innocent man; they shoot at him suddenly, without fear.”** Cursing and bitterness are ugly. Sin makes our words look and act ugly!

“Their feet are swift to shed blood. And the way of peace they have not known.” The history of mankind bears out the fact that we do not know the way of peace. There have always been wars and battles somewhere in the world down through history. Sometimes it is on a local scale, a few times on a world-wide scale. Today is no different. The leaders of the world have to give much effort into keeping the peace. Sometimes the peace has to be kept through war. Sin makes our feet run fast to shed blood, innocent blood, mostly to just gratify our pride, our covetousness, and our hatred. Sin makes our feet do ugly things.

"There is no fear of God before their eyes." The ultimate expression of ugliness is seen in our eyes. There is no fear of God in our eyes. We don't see God as our Creator, or our Judge. We have no expression in our eyes towards God. The time when a person has no expression in their eyes is at death. A dead person doesn't see and a dead person's eyes have no light or life in them. We are spiritually dead and have no true concern for God in our eyes. This is ugly.

If we look at humanity as God sees humanity we would see nothing but ugly, distorted, decaying, violent, arrogant people. This is our moral condition before God. This is what sin has done. But we try to suppress that truth also. We don't want to admit that we are that bad off or that sinful or that guilty. Do we?

CONCLUSION

Is there a solution? Hallelujah! Yes! The solution is in the person of Jesus Christ. He came turn ugliness into beauty. He came to deliver us from our sin.

He came to give us a total make-over. He will give us a new heart, a changed heart, a pure heart. He will give us a new tongue that speaks the truth out of love. He will give us a mouth that will sing praises to Him and encouraging words to others. He will give us feet that will be swift to carry the gospel to others. He will give us eyes to see the beauty of the Lord, the majesty of God, the authority of the Lord, the fear of our great God.

This morning we will be observing Holy Communion. This is another picture. This is God's picture of what it took to turn our sin into beauty. It is the picture of how Christ paid the penalty of our sin on the Cross, was raised from the dead to be our living Savior. It is a reminder that he is coming again to judge the world and rule it in righteousness.

You are invited to trust in Jesus, who died for you and then to show your faith and love by partaking of Holy Communion.

Will you do this? Amen? Amen!