

Man – The Rebel 6-2-02

In our study last week on the holiness of God, we saw how the awesome display of the glory of God made our sinful humanity appear, as it is in truth, utterly detestable. Isaiah first recognized his mouth as being one of the most offending members of his body. He saw that he was no different from the people of his nation that he had been condemning. It takes a powerful experience with God for us to see that our condemnation of others is just as applicable to ourselves, but once we come to face the truth of that we can never be as prideful as we once were. Whenever we make an accusation against others we should see our complicity in the same evil to some extent. We may not speak the profanities and deceit that they do, but we make insinuations that show our heart is identical to theirs. We are just more discrete at how we go about expressing our wicked hearts.

We have been studying the attributes of God. To know God is faithful, merciful, and holy gives us a standard of what is right, what should be in our lives. Yet as we see Him more clearly we realize how far we have to go. What a miraculous work that God has on His hands, transforming us into His likeness. The more we see of God the worse man appears. We will continue in our look at God's attributes next week, Lord willing, but this week let us stop and look at ourselves. The contrast enhances how glorious He truly is and shows us how desperately we need God.

Romans 3:10-19 (NIV) tells us the raw truth of human nature. ¹⁰ *As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one;¹¹ there is no one who understands, 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."¹³ "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips."¹⁴ "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."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."¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."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.*
Romans 3:23 (NIV) *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

That passage tells us of man's fallen state. The problem in each of those conditions is that each description falls infinitely short of the righteousness of God. The standard of decency in the created world is the righteousness of God. Anything short of that is reprehensible, rebellious, and against what is good. We usually make other men our standard, and so we feel we are doing pretty well. The problem is this; any other man is infinitely short of the real standard, the eternal God.

Let us consider man's condition as listed in the verses we just read. "None understand." I might think I do understand but that just shows how little I do know. "None seek God." Jesus said unless the Father draws you, you won't even give God a second thought. Every hungering for God you experience is a gift from God. "All have turned away." There is not a man alive who has not turned his back on the voice of the Holy Spirit pleading in his heart. "All are worthless." God values us enough to lay down His Son's life, but without Him we are of no value at all. We have worth because God chose to set His love upon us. That gives us great worth. Without that we have no worth. "None do good." How many

times have you heard, "I'm a pretty good person"? "NONE!" God says. Most human endeavors at goodness is our pride trying to disguise itself. "Our throats are open graves" —several choice descriptions elaborate that point using adjectives like deceitful, poisonous, and full of bitterness. The tongue is untamable for natural man. "Our feet are swift to shed blood." You say, "Now that one is not me," but remember Jesus says in Matthew 5 that being angry with our brother is subject to judgement like a murder. "Our ways are ruin and misery." The fruit of natural man is ruin and misery and every one of us has seen it in our own lives when we were not walking with the LORD. "We don't know peace." Not unless we really get to know the Prince of Peace. Without Him we have no peace. "We don't fear God." We go our merry way without a second thought of the justice and righteousness of God that will one day confront every soul that has ever lived.

You say wait a minute! I have received Christ and all that is forgiven and cleansed. Yes, if you have received Christ you are a new creation in Him. You have the righteousness of Christ credited to your account. But you and I both know that any moment we so choose we can return to all those ugly descriptions in Romans 3. We must recognize that is our state outside of Christ. If we walk in our old nature, the flesh, that description is a description of us.

There is a very liberating experience of speaking out loud all that you are in Christ. But there is also a needful reality check to speak what you are outside of Christ. It is quite humbling to recognize that outside of Christ I don't understand or seek God. Outside of Christ I turn away from Him and am worthless. Outside of Christ I do no good. Now that is a hard one for people to swallow. In fact people will insist that is not true. Remember that goodness is an attribute of God. All goodness resides in God. Any genuine goodness is of God. Outside of Christ my mouth is an open grave, my feet are swift to shed blood, ruin and misery are my way. Outside of Christ I don't know peace and I don't fear God.

I could have begun each of those sentences with, "In my flesh..." In my flesh my mouth is an open grave, etc. Paul's letter to the Galatians lists the way the flesh acts – your flesh, my flesh, any flesh that is not crucified with Christ. I'm going to read it from a contemporary version so we can't escape the meaning of the words. Gal 5:19-21 (NLT)¹⁹ *When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, your lives will produce these evil results: sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure,²⁰ idolatry, participation in demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group,²¹ envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other kinds of sin. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

When you see someone giving in to a quarreling spirit, they are not abiding in Christ. Outbursts of anger are a demonstration to all that your flesh is on the throne of your heart at that moment. The feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group is the old nature. It is a lack of humility. It is your flesh and mine outside of Christ. The passage ends with a warning. Those who live that sort of life, not those who slip up now and then, but those who you could say their life is characterized by those conditions, will not inherit the Kingdom of God. If that is the norm for them they are not living in Christ. They are not under the Lordship of Christ.

It should put the fear of God in us to realize this is a personalized description of each of us without Jesus. I'm trying to clarify just who we are so we will be aware of how desperately we need Christ in every thing we do and say. There is a mind set in the Christian world that after we come to Christ we are saved from judgement so we can now go on and enjoy life in a good wholesome way. Be nice to people and go to church and everything is fine. Born again believers need Jesus in everything just as much after their salvation as before. It is His life in you that demonstrates you have entered into a saving relationship. That life can be dethroned by your old nature or you can rely upon Christ in each thing you do. I'm not talking about losing your salvation, but a life that witnesses Jesus to the world.

I can pray by myself or I can pray through Christ. The results are dramatically different. I can preach to you or I can let Christ preach to you through me, using my personality and gifts, but at the working source of His life. The Apostle Paul had come to a place in his spiritual walk with God that he could say, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ that lives in me." That should be true of every Christian.

I'll be honest with you. I'm trying to give you such a clear picture of how ugly our flesh is, how deadly and destructive it can be, that you will be desperate to walk in Christ, that your moment-by-moment desire will be to abide in Him. It's easy to think my flesh is better than Hitler's or Stalin's or Edi Amin, but the truth is flesh is flesh. We could sink to the same depths given the right circumstances. Do you believe that? It should put the fear of God in you.

There has been a lot of news about Israel's war crimes: theft, purposeful destruction of property, using civilian shields. In war, it is usually worse than that. You can't name a war that has been fought civilly. When men are out of control they do unimaginable things to one another. Normal people like you and me with absolute power and nothing to hold them accountable do unspeakable acts. It doesn't matter if they are Americans, Jews, Japanese or Russians. Man has the same flesh. He takes the gifts and goodness of God and readily perverts and distorts them into something vile and self-serving. He is the ultimate rebel against all goodness. He deserves eternal hell for his purposeful decision to ignore his Maker, for his ingratitude for all he has been given, and for the destruction in other's lives he wreaks through his selfishness.

The enemy of our soul works very subtly. In the book of Genesis he is called the subtlest (crafty, clever, wily) beast of the field. He says, "You are forgiven. God is merciful. So why not indulge and enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season." What he doesn't tell you is the price in this life you will pay for that momentary pleasure. Nor will he ever be honest about the heavenly reward you could have been laying up, reward that is eternal.

If you are like most people you are thinking I'm speaking of adultery, or drugs, or some blatant indulgence. The Subtle One does not start with the obvious. He starts with subtle things like saying something you shouldn't say about your brother in the LORD. Insinuations that make you feel good but aren't outright lies. That is the first thing on his menu. Then he comes with the main course, speaking evil about your brother. Finally he adds the dessert, harboring bitterness in your heart toward someone. Once you've had a

whole meal of his making, you usually find yourself back for seconds with an expanded appetite. You put it over in your mind, again and again and again.

In the Chronicles of Narnia by CS Lewis the witch asks Edmund what he most desires to eat. "Turkish Delight!" he says. She produces some enchanted Turkish Delight. They are irresistible and leave you craving more. They also dull his discernment and override his fear and concern. He follows her around and does her bidding for more of that luscious Turkish Delight. Satan has his own kind of Turkish Delight. A little self-pity and we taste the delight of sympathy. It makes us feel good and we come back for more. A few bites of putting down someone will make you feel more important than others. Another bite please.

We need to recognize just how destructive sin is. We must not allow ourselves to lose that discernment, our senses, our fear and concern for the consequences. Sin not only is death to me, but also sows death in the lives of those around me. Talk to a counselor and they will tell you about the sins that have compounded with time through the generations. One person chooses to do evil. It affects his children. Through their anger, they act out what their father did in a greater way. They follow his example. Friends are affected, then they affect others. One seed of sin sown can reap a harvest of destruction in the generations to come.

How do we avoid this deadly cycle?

We need Jesus to be LORD of our life daily, not just one time, one day in our distant past. I need Jesus to be my Master today. Through the book of John saving belief is in the present active tense. In other words I need to be presently placing my faith in Christ. Yes, at a point in time I began to, but I need to be presently, actively believing in His Lordship, His right to direct me. Then I look to His direction today. I recognize the prompting of His Spirit to say or do something. That good seed sown is of God. It reproduces itself through the generations also. An incalculable amount of good can come from one action at the leading of our LORD, and it stores up for us heavenly reward.

"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." Philippians 4:13 I can say 'no' to thought cycles that are destructive. I can say 'no' when Satan tempts me with another one of his Turkish Delights. I can say 'yes' to the forgiveness and love that Christ has for my brothers and sisters.

I read the testimony of an addict on the streets of New York. He had heard the Gospel and accepted Christ as his Savior but the lure of the high kept capturing his mind. He tried and tried to say 'no' but ended up doing it anyway. He learned a great lesson. He couldn't but Christ could. When tempted again he would ask Jesus to deal with it. Like the man who said, "When Satan knocks on the door of my heart I always respond, 'Jesus, it's for you.'" Jesus can! Jesus can say "no!" He can unmask the evil behind what looks good.

Watchman Nee witnessed to a couple in the mountains of China. They both accepted Christ the day he passed by their home. They had little instruction to go on. That night when the husband started his nightly drinking binge he felt a strange urge. He asked his wife if Christians should drink alcohol like he did. She did not know. They could not find it

in the Book. When Watchman Nee came back through the man told his story of deciding not to drink. "Why did you decide that?" Watchman asked. "My new Resident Boss tell me no." Praise God, we have a new Resident Boss.

This week I saw the one great difference between King Saul and David. Both were anointed of God. Both had the Spirit of God upon them. Both failed, but here is the difference. When Saul was confronted he justified his actions. He refused to yield to conviction and insisted that old nature was not that bad. Compromise with the old nature is a deadly decision. David, on the other hand, immediately yielded to conviction by confessing and forsaking his sin.

Jesus knows all the perfect attributes of God and He also knows the condition of man. That is why, according to Philippians 2, when He found Himself in the fashion of a man, He humbled Himself. He knows how needy man is, how prone to error. His condition caused Him to look to the Father for every move. The more we see things from the reality that Christ sees them, the more likely we are to respond as He did. We will act only at His direction. We will humble ourselves as He did.

They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts. It's alive but we keep it nailed there on the cross. "The life I live in the body, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Gal 2:20b) I have faith that His life in me is the power to live as God the Father would have me live. So I look to Him for my daily life's direction. I yield to conviction – that means Jesus remains LORD in me. I confess and forsake sin. That is the only action to take when sin is brought into the light and I see my wrong.

When He is LORD over what I do and say, people see Jesus. This is what we all desire. We need a desperate pleading acknowledgement of our need for Jesus. It comes when we see ourselves in the light of His holiness. That helps us cry out in recognition of our need. We have looked today at the revelation of what we are in the word. If we realize it to be true we see in our reflection in those words how desperately we need God's very life in us. Now will you seek – everyday – to live in Him and let His life be seen in you?

In previous weeks we have been considering the wonder of God. Today we see the depravity of man. What a wonder that He would redeem us and guide us daily. But what else would a loving, gracious, merciful God do? Recognize your need to allow Him to be your life continually.

Communion