

Reformation vs. Reprobation

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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You know, as we declare those truths as a body of believers, "the King of my heart, the mountain that I run to," those are personal pronouns meaning, speaking that God is good, that song utilizes an interpersonal connection and relationship there. Why is that vital? Because in just a moment you're about to read Scripture and all throughout the Scripture you're going to see the word "they," and I think oftentimes in this context we're very guilty of looking at the proverbial "they" and "them" and "those," but the argument that we're about to read from Scripture is a collective argument that we're invited to ask ourselves a very important question: is this who I am? Is this my response? Is this my perspective? So I want to challenge you today that as we read these words, we don't read them as just a collective statement somewhere out there about the proverbial "them," but we ask ourselves a very important question: is this who I am in light of who you are, God?

Let's pray.

Lord, as we come to this time that we have declared the truths of your character and who you are, Lord, we now open your word where you're going to give us clear directives and direction about who we are to be, what we are to believe, how we are to live, how we are to think and to speak and, Lord, I pray for each and every one of us that all of the voices of this world that bombard us with great consistency would be silenced; that the only voice we would hear would be your voice speaking through your word and help us, O God, help us not to make excuses, help us not to relegate this portion of Scripture to somebody else somewhere else but, Lord, may we be honest with you and may we be willing to ask the tough hard question: is this who I am in light of who you are? It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Romans 1. As you're turning to Romans 1, we begin today this journey through a book of the Bible that oftentimes has been declared or named the Christian thesis or the summary of biblical Christianity, and I want to be real clear, in 2 Timothy 3 it states that all Scripture is inspired by God, so in other words, we're not allowed to, or we should not elevate portions of Scripture above or below others, however, when it comes to the book of Romans, one of the things about this book of the Bible is it so resonates with us because

it demonstrates so clearly the grace, the mercy and the goodness of God and yet at the same time shows us how powerless we are to do anything about our inherent sinfulness and wickedness. So the book of Romans marries the grace and the goodness of God with our inability to solve our sin problem in and of ourselves. It's a beautiful picture of what you see this thread of redemption and reconciliation in salvation.

As we turn to Romans 1, I want to unpack the title real quickly before we read the text, "Reformation vs. Reprobation," and the reason I titled the message today is because Romans 1 declares that there are two roads of life, there are two paths that we can take, one to reformation and one to reprobation, and the reason I use those words is in verse 17 of chapter 1 that we're about to read, this is the verse of Scripture that led Martin Luther to the truth to declare that the just shall live by faith, the heartbeat of what we know as the Reformation back in 1517. Now it wasn't verse 17 of Romans 1 that initiated that fateful event on October 31st when he tacked the 95 theses up, in fact, it happened some time between 1508 and 1517. He was studying the Scriptures, in particularly Romans 1, and he realized that in and of himself and his own abilities and/or actions, he was incapable of winning favor with the Lord. It led him to have faith, it led him to trust on the Lord alone. Reprobation on the other side of the equation, means to have a corrupt or a vile pattern of thinking that continues to repeat itself over and over again. Essentially the question that you and I have to ask ourselves as we turn to Romans 1 is this: are we on a path of trusting and believing in that which the Lord has provided on behalf of us, or are we strategically and systematically forming a set of excuses for what we want or we desire that is very much contrary to the person and to the things of God?

Beginning in Romans 1:16, it says,

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; 19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. 20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: 21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. 24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: 25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. 26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even

their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:
27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman,
burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which
is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error
which was meet. 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their
knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things
which are not convenient; 29 Being filled with all unrighteousness,
fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy,
murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, 30 Backbiters, haters of
God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to
parents, 31 Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural
affection, implacable, unmerciful: 32 Who knowing the judgment of God,
that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the
same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

You see very clearly from the very first chapter of what we know as the book of Romans, the Lord lays out for us there are two paths, there are two roads, there are two means or ways by which this thing called life can be lived, either on the path of faith toward what we might call reformation, or the other path of reprobation. What I want to do today is take these two concepts, take these two constructs, and just kind of contrast and compare how they operate in our lives. Both of them have some precedents and the precedent is not in the wisdom of the Apostle Paul or in some denominational position, in fact, what you see happen in this chapter and you see even later on in the book of Romans is reaching back into the Old Testament for verification and validity of a specific way of thinking.

Now this is interesting because the book of Romans is primarily addressing Gentiles, those who did not grow up in the synagogue, they did not grow up with a copy of the Old Testament in their home. In fact, when you get to chapter 3, it says the one advantage to growing up Jewish is that you've had the oracles or the Scriptures of God for thousands of years, yet the Apostle Paul takes individuals like you and I who did not grow up with Scripture or the Bible being a part of our lives and declares that it's true in spite of our unfamiliarity therein. So we don't have the right to use the excuse of, "Well, I'm not familiar with, I didn't grow up with," it is true whether we are aware of it or not.

Here in this chapter there are two precedents that are laid for both sides of the equation. The first one is in verse 17 dealing with reformation. It says, "The just shall live by faith." Now this is a quotation from the book of the Old Testament that I know is dearly beloved in this place, it's the book of Habakkuk. That's right, that's a book of the Bible. Look in the table of contents, it's there. It's a small, little, minor prophet that consists of three chapters. Minor prophet not because of its quality of message but because of its quantity. It's very brief, but Habakkuk is one of those individuals that his message was very distinct from the other prophets. Yes, it was a, "Thus saith the Lord and you need to repent because of," but it gives this kind of grand picture from the creation by God to the restoration of creation by God at the end of days. It takes almost all of human history and

summarizes it in three simple chapters about the holiness and the greatness of God and how we should respond to him.

What does he say there in chapter 2, verse 14, quoted by the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:17? The just shall live by faith. Why is that critical precedent here? Because when you get to Hebrews 11, this Hall of Fame of faith, it says by Abel, faith; by Abraham, faith; Moses, faith; Rahab, faith; Sarah, faith. So no matter where we find ourselves on the spectrum of life, whether we're in the first century or the 21st century, those who are justified, and we'll talk about that in just a moment, what that means before God, it is done so by faith.

Now on the other side of the equation, look in verse 22. When it speaks of those who are not exercising faith, when it speaks of those who are on the wrong path of life, it says, "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." Now if you have a study Bible or a Bible that uses marginal notes, back in verse 17 it probably pointed you back to Habakkuk 2:14, but maybe not the case in verse 22. There is speculation of what specific passage this is referring to but when you read the verses before and you read the verses after and it talks about taking an incorruptible God and making him into corruptible imagery and the animals of creation, I think it draws us back to the book of Jeremiah 8:7-8 who talks about, and I love this quotation, it says, "The storks know where to fly, the turtles know where to swim, but my people have lost their way. Thinking that they had more knowledge than I," this is the Lord speaking, "they have become fools and have lost their wisdom."

So the picture that we get from Jeremiah is that when we think we know better than God, we think we're wise but we're actually acting as a fool and this is critical for the precedent here because Jeremiah was a unique prophet. Most of the prophets, most of them were what we call pre-exilic, meaning they prophesied before the Babylon captivity hundreds of years, multiple generations in advance, "Judgment is coming, the Babylonians are on the doorstep, we need to repent and we need to change." There are a few prophets who preached during the exile or after. Jeremiah is unique not just because he was told not to marry, not just because he's known as the Weeping Prophet, but he prophesied both before and during the exile. When this statement is made about taking the incorruptible God and making him corruptible imagery here, they were on the cusp of judgment. They were right on the edge of the judgment and the wrath of God being poured out on them and I believe the Lord uses this reference because we need to understand today that as we live out what's described in the rest of chapter 1, we are guilty of saying, "Well, one day or later on," he says, "No, at any moment, at any time, the wrath and the judgment of God can be poured out on those professing yourself to be wise yet you are fools."

So there's this precedent for reformation and reprobation but the next thing we have to address is this: what is the product? What happens when we walk down this path of life? Back in verse 16, it says, "it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." When we exercise faith, when we trust in what the Lord has said for our lives, let me share with you what the products are. 1. Power. Power. Later in 1 Corinthians 1 it says the preaching of the Gospel is to those

who are perishing foolishness, but to those of us who are saved, the word that's used in this context, it is the power of God. So the product of faith is the ability for that which is obstructing our lives to be removed or that which needs to be manifested put in place. It is the power unto salvation.

Now salvation, that word infers being saved or rescued from something. That which was blind having sight. That which was in darkness now in light. That which was headed toward death is now experiencing life. So when that word "salvation" is used, it presumes the fact that we are headed down the wrong direction, that we were rescued, we were saved, we were pulled out by the goodness and the grace of God. But it's that third product there, the just shall live by faith. Justification.

You know, later in 1 Corinthians 6 when describing the totality of our salvation, it says we've been regenerated, born again; we've been sanctified, made holy; we've been justified. The book of Jude, that little one chapter book of the Bible right before the book of Revelation, it says that we are presented faultless before his throne and that's what justification is. The just shall live by faith. When faith is exercised, then one day in spite of our spiritual blindness, in spite of our inherent sinfulness, in spite of our darkened heart of sin, that we can actually be declared just, we can be declared righteous, we can be declared capable and able of a vibrant eternal relationship with the Lord.

Now let's look at the product on the other side. As you read this passage, particularly beginning in verse 21, you will notice that there are some descriptions and there are some words of activity and actions that many would say are probably at least PG-13 at worst. In fact, toward the end of chapter 1, there are 23 descriptions of types of sinful behavior, mannerisms, activities and even decisions of life, but before that there is one particular sin, there is one particular behavior or mannerism that is described in great and grave detail and in doing so it kind of sets the template for all of them, and what we discover is that all 24 of these behaviors, all 24 of these sins fall into the same trap, however the Lord is using this one particular one because it is so visible to us, it is so prolific to us, and it is so easy to see it enacted out. Notice what it says in verse 25, they "changed the truth of God into a lie." You see, when we're trusting in our own righteousness, when we believe that we know better than God does for our life, we may not tell others, we may not admit it to God, but deep down inside we know we're living an absolute lie.

You know, I share with you that one day there may come a day where I get the privilege to write a series of books that I've always wanted to write and one of those books is entitled "If My Walls Could Talk." Now I want you to know, if we've ever had the privilege of meeting in my office, I have what I call magic walls: anything you say, anything I say stays in there. But one day I'm going to change all the names, change all the locations just as an encouragement to people that the Lord got these people through some stuff and he can get you through some stuff as well.

The reason I bring that up is whether it is this particular sin that's described for three verses or whether it is the other 23 that are listed, do you know what I've discovered about when we're struggling with rebellion, when we're struggling with a reprobate mind,

is we put up a facade and we put up an image but deep down inside we're lying to ourselves about how happy we are. Deep down inside we're miserable and we claim, in fact, our culture today says that these decisions, these behaviors should not just be accepted, they should be celebrated; that we should celebrate our rebellion, we should celebrate this and yet deep down inside we're lying to each other and we're lying to God and we're lying to ourselves because we're doing the same thing Adam and Eve did in Genesis 3, making this declaration that we know better than God. "I'm smarter than God. I'm wiser than God. I know how best to live my life." What does it produce? A life of lies which leads us to the next point.

So what's the process? How does this happen? How does faith lead us down one road but this life of lies down the other? When you go to verse 16 and 17, it says the just shall live by faith and that is the simple process, in fact, later in Romans 10, and we'll allude to this later in the service today, it says that whomever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Can I share with you the process of faith? It's really pretty simple. The first thing we have to understand is that we're the problem. We're the one who's messed up. We're the one who's sinned. We're the one who has rebelled. The second thing is this: being willing to admit that Jesus Christ alone is the answer to our sin problem and then being willing to call out and cry out to God to merge those two, our inability yet admission thereof and his complete capacity to save.

The just shall live by faith, but what about the process for the rest of the chapter? You know, there are 24 specific sins and things and lifestyles that are listed, though one is in grave detail and the others listed just by their title and/or name, you know, one thing about all 24 of these is that you don't just wake up one day and become one, there is a process that goes way back in one's life and whether it's the men with men and women with women, that which is unnatural and unseemly, that doesn't happen overnight, that's something that takes place over years and years and years. Haters of God, disobedient to parents, those things fester for an elongated period of time.

I do want to call your attention to verse 29. Right there in the middle of this list it says those who murder. Hm, it's interesting particularly in the last week, that this is one of those terminologies that's really come to the forefront of our social conversation because in one of the states of our Union, they have now declared that it is legal to end a child's life all the way up to the point of their physical birth. I don't care how you slice or dice it, it's murder and it didn't happen overnight and it didn't happen in 1973 with the Supreme Court case. This has been happening for years and years and years and can I share with you the lie of this? That in that particular state, you can be fined thousands of dollars for destroying a rare eagle's egg but yet you can take a child's life all the way up until they cut the umbilical cord. Do you know what that is? That's a life of lies, that's what that is. You're lying to yourself, you're lying to each other and you're lying to God that you think you know what you're doing. Professing ourselves to be wise, we are fools. No question about it. But that's a process. It doesn't happen overnight. None of these things you just wake up and, ding, there it is.

It happens over a series of life which begs the last thought: what's the price? What's the price to be paid for faith? What's the price to be paid for this reprobate mind? Well, in the faith side of the equation, the reformation side, you know, I'm reminded of Luke 15 where Jesus tells the story of a sheep that is lost, a coin that is lost, and then a child or a son that is lost, and it says that as the picture of God waiting for him to repent, that he came to his senses. Do you know what the price you've got to pay for faith, the price you've got to pay for salvation, the price you've got to pay for justification? You've got to be willing to admit it's your fault and you're the problem. You've got to come to your senses. Do you know what the price on the other side is? Verse 18 says the wrath of God, and the last verse of this chapter says the judgment of God. The price must be paid.

Now in our culture today, we find ourselves at a very heightened season of athletic competition. One of the most, in our culture, revered and participating in and watched sporting events of the year is fastly, quickly approaching us, what we know as the Super Bowl, and if you've not be in tune on kind of the events leading up to it, there is controversy out there regarding in particular one team that either should or should not be there. Just to kind of catch you up to speed a little bit. Last weekend there was a very controversial call that was not made. By the way, I don't know about you but I find it intriguing there was no flag thrown, no penalty called, yet the person who committed the act was fined over \$20,000 by the league for doing something wrong yet he didn't get a flag for doing something wrong. So there have been lawsuits that have been filed and people that have been shouting and saying, "We need to go back. We need to replay the wrong call or maybe even replay the whole game. It would change everything." Lawsuits filed, people shouting, yelling, hollering. Well, finally in the last 48 hours, the governing body of the NFL has issued a response saying that even though they admit they got the call wrong, even though they admit that it should have gone the other way on the field, that because of all of the planning in advance and all the things that have been put into motion, that to do what people are asking would cost in excess of 100 million dollars and it is a price that is too high to pay. Isn't that interesting. We've become a culture that says that enough money and it can be wrong and we'll just live with it.

So let me ask you about the price for faith. It wasn't 100 million dollars, it was the shed blood of Jesus Christ. He was willing to pay the price for your sin, he was willing to pay the price for my sin, and you can't put a dollar figure on what the book of Acts calls the blood of God being shed for our sin and our rebellion. The price has been paid or you can say, "Nah, I'm gonna pay it myself." The problem is that leads to wrath and judgment but if you let Jesus pay the price, it leads to salvation and justification. There are two roads you can walk down, the question is which one are you going to go?

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, I know today it's not the 16th century, I know your name is not Martin Luther, but maybe you're that individual today with the proverbial light bulb came on and you realized that forgiveness of sins and the salvation of your soul is not comprised of a set of good deeds or religious behavior but in the price that Jesus Christ was willing to pay for your sins. Whether you're in this room proper or you're on the other side of the camera, if that's who you are today, would you be willing to just have a conversation with the Lord? Romans 10:13 says whoever

calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. This conversation doesn't have to be had out loud, you don't even have to use the same phrasing or words that I might use, but maybe your conversation, the decision, the process of faith would go a little something like this. "Lord, today I just want to admit that I'm the problem. I'm the one who has rebelled. I am the one who has sinned and I believe that Jesus Christ alone is the answer to my sin problem. So God, today I want you to know I believe. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to pay the price for my sins on his cross. And I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that three days later he rose from the dead so I could be forgiven, I could be saved, I could be justified in your eyes. Lord, today I declare it's not by my own doing, it's not by my own deeds, it's not by my own works, it is in the shed blood of Jesus Christ alone I am staking my life and my eternity. Lord, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. In the best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, if that's the decision you made today, that's the conversation you had with the Lord today, we'd love to celebrate with you. We'd love to have a conversation with you as well.

Lord, as we come to this time in our service where we have celebrated who you are, we've been challenged by your word, now we have the privilege to respond. Lord, I pray that we would heed the movement of your Holy Spirit. Lord, I pray that we would heed the activity of your word, your Scripture in our life, that we would put aside the excuses of the world and the language of the world and we would listen to your voice and your voice alone. Help us, O God, today to be where you desire us to be. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads us. Whatever decision, I'm going to be right here at the front.