

Sunday, February 10, 2013

HOPE RISING THROUGH THE ULTIMATE EXCHANGE

Romans 1:16-17

There is a statement we often hear today: *Life is a series of endless possibilities.*

If I could “right size” that statement, I would say that life is not a series of endless possibilities; *life is a series of daily trade-offs.* The quality and well-being of our lives have everything to do with the trade-offs we make.

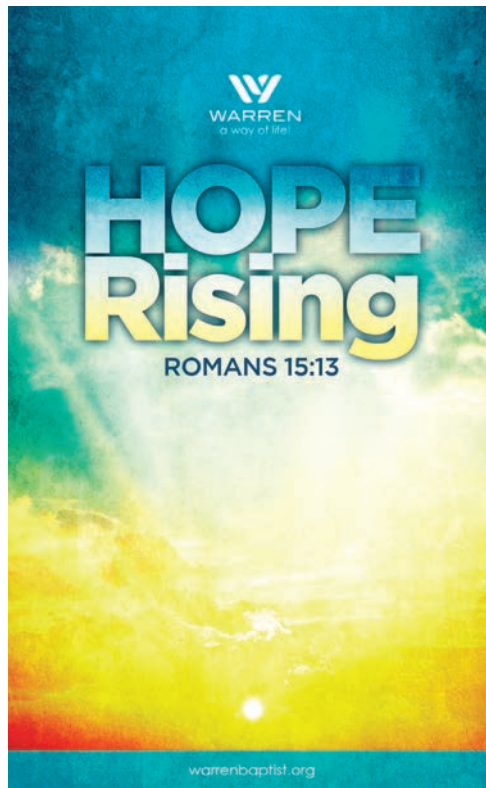
I remember as a child going to the Smoky Mountains with my family. We went to a place in Cherokee, North Carolina, called The Trading Post. As soon as I got out of the car, I was ready to “trade” some of my dad’s money for some things I wanted to purchase. Years later when I became a dad, I had the opportunity to make some of these trades again, but this time it was my money and my kids.

Making trades. That is what we do. We trade our time, energy, attention, desire, money, etc., to try to get the things we want, need and hope to have.

Life is not just about how many possibilities are “out there.” The real question is *what kind of trade-offs are we making?*

Think about it. You can’t have all the advantages of being single *and* being married. You have to make a trade-off. Single Life/Married Life. You can’t be married and not be concerned or considerate of the well-being and needs of your partner. You can’t have children and endless amounts of uninterrupted time for yourself.

There are trade-offs both at home and in your career. You can’t be a leader and not take responsibility. You can’t schedule a busy weekend and get a lot



of rest. You can’t speak up and remain anonymous. You can’t indulge endless calories and maintain your ideal body weight. You can’t sit and be fit because “no pain, no gain.”

What kind of trade-offs are you making?

In the opening verses of the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul talks about the ultimate trade-off. In fact, everything Paul writes about in the book of Romans is summed up in concentrated form through this verse:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel...” (Romans 1:16 ESV).

What is the Gospel? In simplest terms, *gospel* means *good news*. But more specifically, it is the good news of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. It is the act accomplished by Christ for you. It is the good news of what Christ has done. He took care of what you cannot do.

Paul says that if you know the Gospel, you do not need to be ashamed of the Gospel because you are not a loser, you are a winner!

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew

first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith” (Romans 1:16-17 ESV, underline added for emphasis).

What is “it”? The Gospel. The book of Romans is about the Gospel—celebrating and elevating the Gospel in your mind, heart and life.

“The Gospel is the heart of the Bible. Everything in Scripture is either preparation for the Gospel, presentation of the Gospel, or participation in the Gospel.” —Dale Harvey

The Apostle Paul’s challenge in Romans 1:16-17 is to help us understand the necessary, essential need to make a trade-off of our lives and futures for the Gospel. It is the ultimate exchange. It is the greatest trade-off we can ever make.

We all have a natural tendency, a “default mode.” What is it? Self-reliance. Our natural tendency is to trust, rely and depend upon ourselves rather than God. We pull ourselves up and attempt to improve and better ourselves through a life focused on and directed by self-reliance. But the truth is self-reliance is our greatest betrayer.

How many times have you thought you were right when, in reality, you were wrong? How many times have you leaned on yourself only to be betrayed by what you thought, believed and hoped you could do or become? Self-reliance is just like a bucket of water with a hole in the bottom. It just keeps pouring out and pouring out and pouring out. We all need something greater than self-reliance.

No matter how good our intentions, our nature is to self destruct. We need to change our “operating system.” We need an upgrade that moves us from self-reliance to something the Apostle Paul presents as *righteousness*. When righteousness becomes a part of our internal operating system, it changes how we relate and live this world.

Do you know what is needed in regard to making a trade-off for righteousness?

I realize the word, *righteousness*, is somewhat a lofty word, and there may be those who find it difficult to provide a clear, biblical definition. Righteousness is the second of the vocabulary words we are learning as we go through the book of Romans.

In review, the first vocabulary word we studied was the word, *hope*. Hope is our master theme and over arching focus in this series.

Hope, according to the Bible, is not wishful thinking. We often say, "I hope," meaning, "I wish it would go my way." According to the Bible, hope is *confident expectation* that enables us to look forward with joy and to endure trials with patience.

Our second word, *righteousness*, is used more than 60 times in the book of Romans, either directly or as a derivative.

What is righteousness? Righteousness is *conformity to what is right* based on God's claims concerning us. It includes alignment with His character, purpose and revelation.

What do we understand to be true about God according to His Word? What does God expect? What guidance and direction does He give us about life?

Righteousness is something God is, God has and God gives. Our focus today is going to be on the last two words: God gives. How do we get a "righteous upgrade" in our lives?

Here are a few observations in order to help us come to a few conclusions.

The Righteousness of God is a Necessary Exchange Because of His Character—Condemnation

There is a necessary exchange that has to take place for you to ever have any kind of relationship with God because of who God is. God is righteous and you are unrighteous.

Righteousness means that God is *always* in the right. God can be trusted and you can depend on Him. He will give right direction for your life every time.

"What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, 'That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.' But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us?" (Romans 3:3-5 ESV).

It is this idea: Are we going to tear down the character of God and make God like one of us so that we can be comfortable with our own image of God? No. God is God. He is right and He is righteous. Therefore we have to deal with the issue of our unrighteousness. In that sense, God is in the right and we are in the wrong. That means we are condemned in our unrighteousness.

Condemnation is the issue in that God is righteous and you are unrighteous. Therefore the Apostle Paul uses the remainder of the book of Romans to help you, believers and the people of Rome understand about righteousness—who God is, what God does and what God gives.

Look at this simple outline of Romans by Warren Wiersbe:

...the righteous shall live by faith.
—Romans 1:17 ESV

Righteousness...
Demanded 1:18–3:20 Sin
Declared 3:21–5:21 Salvation
Developed 6:1–8:39 Spirit
Declined 9:1–11:36 Sovereignty
Demonstrated 12:1–16:27 Saints
—Warren Wiersbe

First, righteousness is *demanded* because God is righteous. When we see ourselves, we understand we are in sin and unrighteousness.

Second, there is a righteousness that is *declared* by the work of Jesus Christ that results salvation. There is a declared righteousness that can become ours. No longer are we declared to be condemned; we are declared to be righteous in the work of Jesus Christ.

Then there is a righteousness that is *developed*. We may be declared to be righteous in Christ, but even as believers, we know we struggle with temptation, sin and weakness in our lives. How do we get to live out our lives according to the righteous standard of God? We can't do it on our own; we have to have a different source in power—the Holy Spirit.

Next, we go into a very interesting part of the book of Romans—a righteousness *declined*. This refers to a righteousness declined by those who continue to pursue the law. A righteousness declined is a part of the mystery of God's work in history. Some people believe, some don't. Their choices ultimately relate to God's sovereignty.

Last, we see the righteousness that is now *demonstrated*. Once we have been declared righteous and the Spirit is developing righteousness within us, then there is a righteousness that begins to be lived out in our lives. We live a righteous life not by our strength, effort or ability, but we live in conformity with the character and will of God. We are no longer sinners struggling to try to be better. We have a whole new classification called *saints*.

The Righteousness of God is a Revolutionary Exchange Because of His Grace—Imputation

The righteousness of God is a necessary exchange because of who you are in comparison to His character and nature. You can never merit, earn or get right with God of your own accord. For example, it would be like having a big plate of spaghetti while wearing a white shirt. I would probably splatter myself with tomato sauce. I can try to

remove the stain with water, but I will never completely remove the stain.

It is the same with sin. Only God can change and make me pure and clean and whole and holy. God does what I can't do; He makes the exchange by His grace. The righteousness of God is a revolution exchange because of His grace. The word used to describe this is *imputation*.

Let's make this real easy. What is the opposite of *imputation*? Amputation. An amputation is removing or separating something. It is taking away something that belongs to or should have been part of. In most cases, amputation refers to the human body.

When we talk about imputation, we are talking about a work of God where instead of living alienated, separated or put away from God, God gives us what is needed to bring us back into relationship with Himself. God grafts us back in so that there is an exchange between our sinfulness and His righteousness. Now we are able, by grace, to have a right relationship with God.

The bad news of the Bible is very clear: we are all alienated, separated and isolated because of our life-link to the first man, Adam.

"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (Romans 5:12 ESV).

This verse talks about the fact that you are in sin because of Adam. Since you cannot claim sinlessness or perfection, you cannot claim righteousness.

Like all sinners, we take pride in sin. We indulge our sin. We live for ourselves. We regard Christ as maybe Someone out there, but not Someone in whom we ultimately surrender and submit. As a result of our own personal rebellion, we are in sin. The Bible is clear about this: God opposes sin in every form and every way.

But here is the good news! God, who knew your sin, alienation, separation and hopelessness, took an act to deliver you. He stepped in and intervened by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to rescue you.

In recent days, many of us prayed for the rescue of a little boy named Ethan. In Midland City, Alabama, a crazed man boarded a school bus where he horrified and traumatized a group of children, and then kidnapped five-year-old Ethan. Day after day, Ethan was in bondage—isolated, alienated, cut off from his family and everyone who loved him.

It appeared Ethan's entire life and future were in jeopardy. Then came the news broadcast with three words in the sound bite: *safe and sound!* As the words echoed near the bunker where Ethan was found, the roar of cheers and the applause of gratitude and excitement could be heard around the world. Ethan, who had been condemned, had now been set free.

That is the nature of the Gospel! Satan took you into the slavery, isolation and alienation of sin. Although you are loved by God, you are limited, bound and hidden away in the darkness of sin. But Jesus Christ came in for the rescue. Jesus has set you free. Jesus has opened the door and paved the way, and He did it because He was willing to make the trade-off.

"...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8 ESV).

God sent Christ in for the rescue, not because you were worthy and not even because you were willing, but simply because of His love and His grace.

*The Son of God made a trade off.
He traded places!*

Here is the interesting thing about Jesus:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let

us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV, underline added for emphasis).

It is unfortunate that most Bible translations use the word "for" in this phrase: "who for the joy that was set before him."

As a result, some teachers interpret the verse this way: "Jesus saw the cross, but He was so excited about what was going to happen on the other side that He was willing to endure the cross so that He could get to the joy on the other side."

There is truth in that. But in Hebrews 12:2 when it says, "who for the joy," the actual word used in the Greek means *anti*. To be *anti*-anything is to be *opposed to, opposite of, instead of*.

The Bible says, "...who *anti* the joy." Instead of the joy of all that was before Jesus Christ—the glory of heaven, the wonder of worship, all the things that were already His—Christ was willing to make the trade-off and say, "Instead of this joy, I am going to the cross and I am going to despise the shame." But then upon resurrection, Jesus came and was seated at the right hand of God. Jesus made the trade-off knowingly, willingly, lovingly and sacrificially.

Jesus Christ made the trade-off for you because He was willing to do it in love. There is nothing you can ever do to make God love you more and there is nothing you have ever done to make God love you less. It is all because of what Christ has done. It is because of this exchange of righteousness that you are made right with God.

"God's righteousness is revealed in the Gospel; for in the death of Christ, God revealed His righteousness by punishing sin; and in the resurrection of

Christ, He revealed His righteousness by making salvation available to every believer.” —Warren Wiersbe

God doesn't just say, "It is okay." There is much more. God fulfilled the standard of His character (righteousness) through the death-penalty of sin in Christ that you might experience the exchange to freedom—knowing the joy of being safe and sound because of what Christ has done for you. Christ made a trade-off for you. That's the Gospel!

The Righteousness of God is a Lasting Exchange Because of His Promise—Salvation

There is a promise to everyone who is willing to trade-off their life (their sin, pride, lust, self-reliance, self-effort, self-righteousness, self-improvement, etc.). If you are willing to trade-off your life and say, "I put my trust in Christ and Christ alone," then you, by faith, can be made righteous. God reinstates you to righteousness, not because you are worthy, but because Christ made it possible by paying the price for you through His death and resurrection. This is the good news of the Gospel!

"...in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19 ESV).

It is not that God doesn't count trespasses. He does. God never overlooks sin. God also loves you, but He doesn't love you because you are lovable. Don't ever get the idea: *It's okay. I am a sinner and that's just how I am. God will love me anyway.* God loves you in spite of who you are. God is a God of righteousness.

The Bible clearly speaks of the righteousness and judgment of God. You will either face God as Righteous Judge or Forgiving Father.

The reason God will not count your trespasses against you is because He counted your trespasses against Christ. And Christ was willing to take your sins upon Himself:

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV).

Talk about an exchange!

Are you willing to make the trade-off? Are you willing to trade your life (your weakness, sinfulness, hopelessness, helplessness) on who Christ is that you may know the power of Christ and be made righteous? The only way that can happen is by faith—total acceptance and absolute trust in Jesus Christ.

I am praying there are people who will make that exchange today. It begins with a heart of receptivity, understanding you are unrighteous, but an understanding that leads you to a place of surrender where, by faith, you put your trust in Jesus Christ. Christ then becomes the focus of everything about who you are, where you go, what you do, how you live. Righteousness becomes a way of life for you as a true believer.

I have received righteousness that I don't deserve. And now, I live in righteousness because God is reclassifying and upgrading the "operating system" of my life.

Sadly, some people think the way to become a Christian is by trying to upgrade their own righteousness. They can't do it. You can't do it. You have to come to Christ and trust in Him.

Christ became one of us in order that He might deliver us by grace—the fallen, the broken, the condemned—and give us life, freedom, hope and a future.

Everything that is not right about you is made right when you put your faith in Jesus Christ. Not only is it made right in that moment, Jesus then begins to make things right over your lifetime until one day salvation finds its ultimate completion and you are safe and sound through His love. That is why the Apostle Paul said,

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith'" (Romans 1:16-17 ESV).

Jesus Christ made the trade-off for you. The question today is what trade-offs are you making?

Father, thank You for the importance of these two verses. Thank You for Christ Who, in love, was willing to take upon Himself the weight of our brokenness that He might give life and joy and blessing. Thank You for this amazing exchange Jesus made for us.

Father, how I pray for the work of grace to be evident in this place right now. I pray this will be the time and place where trade-offs will be made and trade-offs will matter for eternity. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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