

Sunday, March 3, 2013

## HOPE RISING FROM KINDNESS LEADING TO REPENTANCE

Romans 1:28–2:5

There is no one like our God—the great things He does for us and the greater things He has for us.

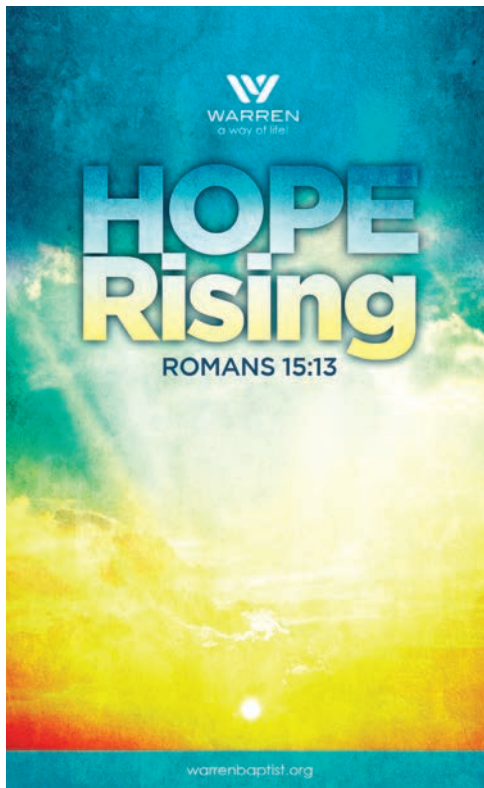
While none of us knows how the script of our lives will unfold into the future, we know the One who has written every line. As we follow the script of God's plan for our lives, it will be amazing to see what He will do with people who are willing to let Him be God and live for His glory.

A script has already been written by God for my family today. Our third grandchild was due eight days ago. I arrived on campus this morning with only one message to share with you: *No news is good news*. However, at 9:13 this morning, I received a phone call from my son, "Dad, the baby is here. Everybody is fine." *Boy or girl?* "All we are going to tell you is that we already have one of them."

My son's family of four is now five: Joseph and Abigail along with children Isabella, Miles and the new baby—and I can't wait to meet him or her later today when we arrive in Lynchburg, Virginia!

And to add to the joy of this good news, exactly 34 years ago today a wonderful woman by the name of Connie put this gold ring on my finger. On our 34th wedding anniversary, we received our third grandchild. All I can say, "It's a good day!"

God has been good and faithful in my life, marriage, family and this ministry... and I am so thankful. Because of the goodness of God in my life and, in particular, my marriage, the last thing I want to do is something stupid—to mess this up, trivialize or treat it as though it is not very, very special.



The goodness I have received over the last 34 years and have shared with my wife further tethers my heart to commitment and to the journey we are making through life together.

The same sort of realization in my own life today is the same type of application Paul is expressing in Romans 2 to the church in Rome.

"Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" (Romans 2:3-4 ESV).

When you have experienced goodness in your life, it does not bring out badness; it brings out a passion to be better. It leads you to a higher level of good—to the pursuit of righteousness.

In the last part of Romans 1, we saw a dark and bleak picture of what the human race, society and culture looks like when people despise their Creator and worship the creature. When we take God out of the picture, we have idolatry, immorality and all of the expressions of life without God. Life is topsy turfy. The very things God says

are wrong, culture and society say are right. The very things God says to destroy, people celebrate and promote.

"... there was and is overwhelming evidence of human disorientation Godward resulting in disintegration manward... It is not only the absence of repentance which troubles the Apostle, but the presence of celebration. Far from being overwhelmed with a sense of failure and responsibility, a carnival air [similar to Mardi Gras] of casual enjoyment prevails in human society. Instead of acting as guardians of each other's souls, people tend to function as encouragers of each other's destruction. Where mourning might be expected, rejoicing is to be seen; instead of wholesome disapproval of sin, there is wholesale approval of unrighteousness." —Stuart Briscoe

Standing in the shadows of Romans 1, the Apostle Paul now focuses on another group of people—religious "bobble heads." These are people who nod in agreement and say, "That's right, Paul, you give it to them. That's right, Paul, you tell them the judgment of God is on their life. You tell them the wrath of God is coming and they deserve it."

However, Paul is an "equal opportunity" preacher.

"Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things" (Romans 2:1 ESV).

*Don't think that just because I was clear, hard-nosed and straight forward about the destructive power of sin over those who have chosen to dispel God from their lives that you are any better—you who even agree with me, applaud virtue and yet practice vice in your heart.*

Literally, Paul is saying *if you condemn others on the basis of your knowledge of God's law, then you condemn yourself. If you know the law of God, you are responsible to it, both inwardly and outwardly. Though your outward*

*appearance may seem to make you better than those idolatrous, immoral, vile people whom I have already talked about, don't ever get the idea that you can say amen to somebody else's sin without being exposed and condemned in your own heart.*

Here's the point: there is no such thing as a respectable sinner or respectable sins with God. Some sins may not be as visible or vile in their overall impact to society, culture and others, but no sin should ever be deemed respectable. Paul now puts his finger not on the ugliness of immorality and idolatry, but on hypocrisy.

### **Five Ugly Facts About Hypocrisy**

How many times have you heard someone say, "I don't go to church because the church is full of hypocrites." Many of us at times have looked at ourselves, decisions we have made or actions we have taken and said, "I feel like I am a hypocrite."

#### **What are hypocrites?**

#### **1. Hypocrites feel the sins of others are worse than their own.**

*I may sin. I may have my faults, but at least I am not like him or her.*

Remember the parable Jesus told about the tax collector who went into the temple? The tax collector was a vile sinner. He "would not even lift up his eyes to heaven," but hunkered in the corner and said, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:13 ESV).

Another man, being a Pharisee, stood and said, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men... or even like this tax collector" (Luke 18:11 ESV).

Do you think that glorifies God? No. We are told the tax collector went home justified, rather than the Pharisee.

#### **2. Hypocrites think they deserve blessing for their performance while others deserve burden or brokenness because of their faults.**

*Oh, I try hard to be good, so surely God will grade on the curve. God will give me an A for effort.*

God doesn't give A's for effort.

#### **3. Hypocrites believe their outward actions excuse their inward attitudes.**

*As long as I look good on the outside, it really doesn't matter where I am on the inside.*

There are plenty of people who go to church every week, "bobble head" their pastor and say, "Amen, Amen. You tell those sinners they are going to die and go to hell, and the judgment of God is on them."

However, if you have hate in your heart, division, criticism or prejudice, don't think God will somehow justify your hypocrisy. Your outward action is sitting in a pew while the inward attitudes of your heart are different.

#### **4. Hypocrites use the fact of God's forgiveness as an excuse to go on sinning.**

A hypocrite is willing to let the forgiveness of God reinforce their badness rather than letting God's forgiveness break and move them with gratitude to greater goodness.

#### **5. Hypocrites assume their general goodness makes them exempt from judgment only to discover the penalty is the same.**

"Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?... But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed" (Romans 2:3, 5 ESV).

All of us are sinners and our judgments are faulted and unrighteous. God is the only Righteous Judge and He will judge *all* unrighteousness. Therefore we need to understand how serious God is about hypocrisy.

In the community in which we live, we have a lake northwest of us with two names: Clarks Hill and Strom Thurmond. It depends on your orientation and where you live as to the name you use.

Now let's suppose we gather the Clarks Hillists and the Strom Thurmondists, and take them to the lake for a competition where *winner takes all*. The winner is the team who swims from the dam to the furthest extreme on the other side of the lake.

At the end of the day, who is going to win? Is anyone going to win? If the rules state that no one is going to be plucked out of the water, once everyone drowns, everyone loses. It is the same for the moralist and immoral.

Understand this: no amount of moralism can get us to heaven; no amount of immorality can keep us from heaven.

The only person that gets people over, through, and to the other side is the One who intervenes and who is able—Jesus Christ. The moral person and the immoral person; the God-fearing person who is religious and the godless person who is irreligious; they all have to come to the same understanding—they need a Savior.

"The worst form of human badness is human goodness when it becomes a substitute for the new birth." —Adrian Rogers

Nothing is worse than us substituting our best effort for what can only be fulfilled by God's grace.

In Romans 2, we do not know whether the Apostle Paul was writing specifically to the Greek moralists who saw themselves as supreme within the culture or to the Jewish legalists. Certainly the Jewish legal concept could fit right in because Paul goes on to talk about the Jews in Romans 2. Paul clearly knew he fit into the "Jewish Legalist" category at one time in his life. He had been a moralist who persecuted the church and ultimately killed Christians in order to be the "pruning agent" of God. Ultimately what changed Paul's life was something called *grace, kindness*.

"Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's

kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4 ESV).

Once you realize grace has been given to you (a grace you don't deserve), then it is that grace that moves you to the highest level of commitment from the heart.

Grace moves you to repentance. So how do you live life without being a hypocrite? How can you be a person whose life is lived for the purpose of God and who celebrates the goodness of God?

### **1. Grace is Intended to Lead Us to Repentance**

Everything God has done that is good in your life does not make you better than others, it just makes you more in debt than others to respond to Him with a heart of repentance.

In 1 Corinthians 10, the Apostle Paul writes about the history of Israel and how, by the grace of God, the people were taken out of bondage in Egypt to be led to the promised land.

The Apostle Paul talks about their journey and says that all were "under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink... Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased" (1 Corinthians 10:1b-5a ESV).

Although God gave Israel blessing and privilege, God was not pleased with them. Why? Because the grace of God did not lead them to repentance and dependence. Instead, the grace of God only reinforced their stubbornness, their unwillingness and their sense of entitlement. *God ought to give us better than He has given us.*

The Apostle Paul said these things happened to them as examples for us, examples to remind us of the importance of acting on grace and letting grace move us to repentance. Never let the grace of God cause you to presume God will trade on His goodness.

Sadly there are those who are so accustomed to having resources through the grace and goodness of God—multiple copies of Bibles, hearing the preacher "live," via MP3, online, television, radio—they become so saturated with the blessing that they actually let that blessing create a callousness of heart. Rather than being tender and responsive to the Word of God, they feel it somehow exempts them from obedience to God.

The Apostle Paul says we should never think that way. The access we have to the Gospel, the message we hear, the church we have are a part of God's grace intended to lead us to repentance.

**What is repentance?** Repentance complete admission of guilt before God and a total surrender of our lives to Him.

Real repentance is always a complete admission of guilt before God. *God, I am not worthy of any good that you would give to me.* The result of gratitude is *a total surrender of my life to Him.*

*Repentance is not mental remorse or emotional regret; it is a resolve in your heart to live solely for the righteousness of God.*

### **2. Repentance is Authenticated When It Leads Us to Obedience**

If a person has true repentance in life, that repentance results in obedience. Biblical repentance is a thankful response to God's forgiveness such that you are willing to honor and follow Him.

Today, we find many people who call themselves Christ-followers, but they don't follow. Have you been baptized? *No, I don't think that's important and I am not going to be baptized.* Do you give? *No, I don't feel like I can right now.* Do you witness? *No, you know it is so uncomfortable for me.* Are you committed to a church? *Well you know, I go here and there.*

If you are not following, don't call yourself a follower; it is an oxymoron.

Repentance, when it is real, leads to obedience.

"Salvation happens in a moment of time, but evidences itself over a period of time." —James MacDonald

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15 ESV).

Following is the opposite of self-love, self protection, self expression and self-service. It is a life all about the Savior.

### **3. Obedience is Expressed When It Leads Us to Greater Sacrifice and Service**

"He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life (Romans 2:6-7 ESV).

God honors those who in obedience honor Him. Yet, His grace and goodness are intended to move us to greater service and sacrifice.

*Real obedience is not posture; it is attitude, an ambition to live for the glory of God.*

I heard about a mom who wanted to take her little boy to "big church." She brought him to church and sat in a pew near the front. After the worship service began, this little boy would pop up, stand up and walk around.

The mom was bothered by the distraction her little boy was creating and leaned over to say, "Honey, sit down. You have to sit down."

The young boy sat for a moment, but soon created another distraction. The mom repeated, "Honey, sit down!"

When the boy's behavior didn't change, the mom reached over, got him by the shoulders and said, "Sit down!" as she put her hand on his head to hold him in place.

The little boy sat there and after a brief moment replied, "Mommy, I may be sitting down on the outside, but I'm standing up on the inside."

Real obedience is not posture; it is attitude, an ambition to live for the glory of God. When there is a sense of understanding God's grace, when you have tasted the goodness of the Lord, you are discontent to do anything more or less than giving God your whole heart and best.

God has been good to us and "to whom much was given, of him much will be required" (Luke 12:48 ESV). It is not enough for us to just know that God has blessed our church. It is important we understand that with every privilege and every gift comes a greater call and responsibility.

*Father, we don't want to be hypocrites. We don't want to be a group of people who allow the blessings we have make us callous. But God, how much more we want to be followers who honor You at the highest level of faith and obedience. And not only would we have a posture of obedience, but an attitude of obedience that drives us.*

*We know that Your word says "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him" [2 Chronicles 16:9 ESV]. Lord, all we want to do today is to give You our hearts and future.*

*Father, I pray there would be people here today who would see and know that they need Jesus and that today, they would put their trust in Him. I pray there are others who know Christ and need to follow Him in baptism or church membership and that this would be the time, the place and the moment they would move toward You in greater obedience in their lives.*

*Father, I pray You would work in the hearts of members and leaders alike at Warren and put us on our knees at this altar today and we would say, "Lord, we are yours and Your goodness is not something we will indulge or feel entitled to, but Your goodness moves us and we are ready to go; we are ready to serve. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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