

Romans 1:16-23 NIV “Shame for the ashamed”

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, (19) since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

“(20) For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

(21) For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

These verses contain a vital life secret.

Mystery surrounds them.

These verses hold the key to most of our misery.

This text openly diagnoses what has gone wrong in the human situation.

There's nothing covert or clandestine in the words.

Yet most religious leaders stay mum about this text as if it were a dirty family secret.

Before we open the “closet door,” we must first deal with some common mistakes.

We tend to oversimplify things, don't we?

Remember the old movies?

Good guys wore white.

The bad wore black.

Bloodthirsty Native Americans, eager to remove scalps, preyed on innocent settlers.



To many people, life appears that simple:

- **The good stands unmistakably clear.**
Bad people and evil things threaten.
Differences between right and wrong are plain.

- **The Lord gives us choices.**
Choose right; you go to heaven.

Choose wrongly; you burn in hell.

Do you agree that many life decisions aren't so clear-cut?

If it's complicated to choose right and wrong, how can we be sure of anything?



How do we correctly discern the good?

Gaining a godly view of life requires that we revise some of our thinking.

The Bible doesn't necessarily teach the two categories of people idea.

We need additional info concerning the traditional views of good and bad.

For e.g., Romans 3:23 puts all in one group.

In an LA Bible class, I read this Scripture from Romans: **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”**

A woman about 20 years my senior snapped at me: **“I'm not a sinner. I was made in God's image, and he's perfect.”**

God will judge her, of course, but I sensed that at that moment, she wasn't perfectly controlling her anger.



Genesis 1:27 definitely says that God created male and female in his image.

Being “made in his image” doesn't mean, however, that we're quality.

It means that we should reflect God's goodness.

You probably agree that we don't always do a good job of doing right.

Colossians 3: 5-11 reminds us that certain behavior so badly tarnishes God's image in us that we require renewal.

Norma and I recently discovered that though our 2007 pickup didn't look too bad when clean, certain vital body parts suffered severe rust damage from the inside.

Many of those parts needed almost immediate replacement.

If we wanted to continue driving the vehicle, extensive radical restoration had to take place.



Let's say that you look in a mirror to check out your great looking face.

You see smudges and blemishes.

The mirror doesn't reflect the fetching image you're accustomed to seeing.

The blotches and stains of our actions do not reflect God's image.

I challenge you to read the story of the prodigal son this week paying special attention to the elder son's attitude.¹

From outward appearances, he was a respectable, spiffy, solid citizen.

¹ You'll find it in Luke 15:11-32

Yet jealousy, greed, resentment and bitterness had long “rusted” his innards.

After a realistic look at himself, Paul lamented:

“I know that nothing good lives in me . . .”²

You might say that we’re all bad glasses.

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

That’s why the Lord cautions us against judging and pointing fingers at others; none of us is sinless.



When we quit focusing on and judging others, and look inwardly, we see ample flaws.

“I never looked into the heart of an evil person. I looked into the heart of a good person once, and I was shocked.”

Here’s what we must all face.

When we try to hide our faults and pretend that we’re OK, we make it difficult it to receive God’s help.

Isaiah compares our sin to an infectious disease that spreads quickly, but surely through the entire human race.

“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like

filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.³

Our sins often come back to haunt us, don’t they?

Getting along with other people gets harder too, doesn’t it?

Let’s look at a second fact.

This section of Romans contains two apocalypses.

What is an apocalypse?

Popular writers and some ministers use apocalypse in the sense of a horrible ending—like nuclear holocaust or plague.

Apocalypse did not originally signify disaster.

Apocalypse meant simply to reveal or make something known.

Notice how *Revelation 1:1* uses the word:

“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.”⁴

The word “revelation” here is the word “apocalypse” in Greek.

The *Book of Revelation*, or *The Apocalypse*, reveals some very scary things, but it also tells us many good things.

² Romans 7:18 NIV

³ Isaiah 64:6 NIV

⁴ NIV

Let’s say that you arrive at work tomorrow and find your boss sitting at your workspace.

The boss says, “I’ve got something to tell you.”

“What?”



“You won’t need this desk anymore.

You get the edgy feeling that your boss may reveal something to you.

You’re nearing an “apocalypse.”

You could be in the basement working in the mailroom,
or soon filling out an unemployment application.

But then you could be sitting in a new enclosure enjoying double your present salary.

Either way, an apocalypse is coming.

“Apocalypse” simply means to *reveal* something.

It can be good or bad.

Recall the secret we talked about earlier?

Two apocalypses appear in this part of Romans.

Here’s the first apocalypse:

“The wrath of God is being *revealed* from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness”

Sin begins from our deficiency of two qualities.

Many people seem clueless concerning these virtues.

Paul mentions the duo in our text;

“They neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him . . .”

All other sins result from these two conditions, the Bible says.

A) We don’t glorify God.

B) We don’t thank God.

If you interviewed 1000 persons on the street, asking “What is our chief duty in life?”

What per cent would say,

“My greatest responsibility is, glorify God”?

Interview even 1000 church goers.

How many of them would answer,

“My greatest responsibility is to glorify God”?

We often wonder why life gets so confused, frustrating and hectic.

Most of the chaos we experience can be attributed to the fact that we neglect this truth:
Glorifying our Creator is life’s chief purpose.

When Norma and I first moved to Los Angeles, driving the freeways frustrated us.

Take the wrong turnoff (exit) and you might take hours trying to find your way back.

My cousin warned us about taking the Pasadena Freeway.



He warned, “If you take the wrong turn off, you’ll be lost for hours.

My cousin didn’t give a lot of advice.
His freeway counsel was “spot on.”

When glorifying God isn’t our first priority, we’re always lost and looking for directions.

Nearly every troubled person I’ve counseled over the years could have saved lots of grief had he/she started life with, or at least converted to that understanding.

Is God selfish and just wants things his way?

Not at all.

God created all life and he knows what we need.

Every person who’s ever played team-sports knows that the coach starts with a game plan.

When players don’t follow the game plan, they mess up every play the coach designs.

Once at Pauley Pavilion, I heard the great UCLA basketball coach John Wooden yell at Bill Walton when Walton was trying to dribble the ball down court, **“Walton, you’re not supposed to be dribbling!”**



In other words, the game plan called for the 6’11” center to get down under the basket and let the guards bring the ball up court.

Coach Wooden knew basketball.

He knew how to win.

Players did things his way or found themselves sitting on the bench.

Was coach Wooden being unreasonable to insist on his way—to honor him by following his plan? Few people who know basketball would think so.

Coach Wooden knew how to win.

Neither is God unreasonable when he requires us to glorify him and His ways.

Winning in life requires that we glorify God and honor his “game” plan.

Note another important part of our relationship with God

Are you grateful to God or bitter toward him and toward people?

“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”⁵

We can’t talk about loving God until we love all of his creatures.

“I love everybody. It’s people I can’t stand.”

⁵ 1 John 4:20, 21 NIV

**Hate of any kind darkens our hearts
and cuts us off from God’s love.**



**He will someday reveal His anger against
those who refuse to quit hating.**

**“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven
against all the godlessness and wickedness of men
who suppress the truth by their wickedness.”**

God will reveal justified anger toward those who
hinder others from learning the truth about Him.

**We’re all sinners, who should humbly,
gratefully glorify our patient Creator.**

Let’s look quickly at the second apocalypse:

**“For in the gospel a righteousness from God
is *revealed*, a righteousness that is by faith
from first to last . . .”**

**The Lord understands that we struggle, mired in
confusion and sin.**

**That’s why he sent Jesus, who lived a
perfect life of loving obedience.**

**Jesus knows the way perfectly and he
completely understands God’s game-plan.**

**If we want to model what’s right,
we trust him and follow him.**

**If we believe in him and follow his truth and
love, we find life that lasts.**

**Turning away from him leads to
darkness and frustration.**

**“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is
revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from
first to last.”**

The good news (Gospel) increases.

Jesus shares his righteousness (from God)
because ours isn’t worth a dime.

Jesus came back from the dead.

He’s the only winner in the life death-struggle.

Stand humbly, gratefully with him, never ashamed
to tell others that he manages your life.

**He will raise you on the last day and show the father
how he entered your name in the BOOK of LIFE.**

**“Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will
also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.**

**But whoever disowns me before others,
I will disown before my Father in heaven.**

(Matthew 10:32, 33 NIV)

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