

We bow our hearts in prayer: We thank You, heavenly Father that You have revealed to us the reason for our burdened consciences, our own unrighteousness. We also thank You have revealed the good news of Jesus' righteousness and forgiveness for us. Do not give us up to the lusts and impurities of our hearts, but make us wise in the truth of our salvation and so bless You forever in Your eternal kingdom. Amen.

Romans1:7

Dear fellow redeemed, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Gospel this morning/evening, we hear of a Master who desires to share a great banquet. He previously sent out invitations. He made all the preparations.

The feast was ready, but those invited guests were not. They made excuses.

But the Master's will would not be thwarted by their ingratitude,

He commanded His servants to seek out and compel those **in the streets and lanes of the city... the highways and hedges... and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame... that [His] house may be filled.**

As a parable about our God's desire to share His eternal life and paradise with us, this story teaches us what is clearly revealed elsewhere:

1Timothy2:4

God our Savior desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

But as we will see in our reading, not all people will be saved. But is God to be blamed for this?

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. ^(ESV)

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen* ^(John 17:17)

It's interesting that for a week with a theme like "Invitation," our selected text doesn't sound very inviting.

It starts off talking about **the wrath of God [being] revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.**

And then goes on to reveal the foolishness of man... that against better knowledge,

he turns away from worshipping God preferring to serve inferior objects that God has created.

This better knowledge is what we call the “natural knowledge of God.” St. Paul describes it saying,
For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.
For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature,
have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world...
From the universal magnitude of creation to its atomic minuteness,
we know an almighty God did this.
By its orderly laws of nature, we know an all-knowing and wise God put it together.
What faith it takes to believe that this grand, one-of-a-kind universe is completely by accident!
But to reject this natural knowledge is not faith, it is a denial of the truth, a rejection of God.
St. Paul says that **by their unrighteousness** [they] **suppress the truth.**
... they exchanged the truth about God for a lie.

But why would one suppress the truth or knowingly exchange the truth for a lie?
It comes from the other part of our natural knowledge of God: that He is also our judge.
And this truth, they do not want to admit.
Why? Because of man’s inherited **ungodliness and unrighteousness.**
Our natural knowledge of God realizes that there are to be consequences for our wickedness.

These consequences we see entitled here in our text as God’s wrath.
This wrath is revealed already here on earth before our eyes as the world swirls head-long
into the toilet bowl of filth, injustice, perversion, murder, and so on.
St. Paul says that **the Lord gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity,**
to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.
He is not holding them back any longer, but allowing them to ruin themselves,
becoming prey to their own devices and desires of their hearts.

It’s painful for us to watch them **dishonoring their bodies among themselves**, as St. Paul calls it.
Drug abusers, alcoholics, porn-users at the mercy of their addictions,
helpless to maintain a sane, healthy, respectable life.
Those who once had a conscience that convicted them of their murder of their unborn child,
now try to salve that conscience by militantly fighting for this supposed right.
Those who are confused and lost in the sexual perversions of adultery, homosexuality,
and transgenderism, suffering God’s wrath in ruined marriages, in anxiety, despair,
and other psychoses.
Just to name a few.

What is it about these and so many other sins that cause people so much turmoil in this life?
I would submit to you that at the root of it is not having a clean conscience.
While they may put on a strong face in public, or even be completely self-diluted,
they continue to have a realization that they are not right with God,
that there is a judgment to come at the end of this life.
They may or may not know who this God and judge is;
they may or may not realize the true source of their fear, anxiety, and despair;
they may or may not even acknowledge the existence of their problems,
but built within us is a fear of punishment, not only in this life, but also after this life.

This is something that we should keep in mind for ourselves because when we learn about the problems of the world, we also learn about the problems lurking within ourselves. And so each should take the opportunity to humbly examine his own conscience. While the heathen of the world deny their true Creator and refuse to honor Him, is it not true that we also fail to honor Him when we refuse to confess Him before them? While the world does not desire to accept Him as its judge, by our actions, don't we also deny that He will judge us, when we willfully indulge in sin? While the world **suppresses the truth** about God's infinite qualities, do you lie to yourself when you live as if your lusts and your heart's impurities are hidden from His omniscience.

These sins and many others, left alone, without absolution, or forgiveness, will affect you in the same way the sins of the world affects them. They will plague your conscience, causing you fear of God's wrath, anxiety at His displeasure, and despair in His love and comfort, so that you have no hope to enjoy His invitation to glory, but instead face the prospect of His wrath extending even into eternal death.

If you already have this fear, anxiety, or despair then consider the Master's invitation to you, and recognize that it does not come from your natural knowledge of God. The poor, crippled, lame and blind did not expect to be received at the Master's feast. Nor was it natural for them to believe it possible. Instead, the invitation was revealed to them by the servants of the Master, just as your forgiveness is now revealed to you in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

For the wrath of God due you was meted out on Him upon the cross. For your actions which would deny God of His honor, the Father forsook Him. For your suppression of the truth to hide your lusts and impurities in your heart, the eternal God exposed Jesus to the world and left no sin uncovered. ... This is not for your shame, it's for your glory.

There is nothing natural about this from our standpoint. We weren't born with this innate knowledge that Jesus died for our sins. This is the revealed Gospel that St. Paul spoke about 2 verses before our text: saying that it is, **the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes... for in it the righteousness of God is revealed...** That righteousness is not your natural righteousness but Jesus' righteousness lived for and given to you so that you may have a clean conscience before God and live with no fear, anxiety, or despair of His wrath. What power this is!!

So that you may have and keep this clear conscience, absolved from all sins and guilt, He has given you the precious gift of baptism by which **your heart [has been] sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and your bod[y] washed with pure water.** He sends you His servants, His ministers, to compel you to receive His absolution; and He invites you to feast at the Lord's altar, to receive the righteousness and forgiveness of Christ Himself in His crucified and living body and blood. These are not powerless signs, nor are they anything to be ashamed of.

They are God's answer to our ungodliness and unrighteousness, for a clean conscience.

...

Our 21st century sensitivities would incline us to say that speaking of God's wrath is not a great way to invite people to do anything, let alone believe in their Savior.

And yet, it is only knowing and recognizing the uncleanness of our hearts and conscience that anyone will receive Jesus's invitation with joy and eagerness.

As one who has suffered from an unclean heart and found Christ's revealed righteousness, you know what it is that they naturally suffer from.

You also then have the answer, revealed to you through Scripture, for their suffering.

You do not need to be a great evangelist like St. Paul,

you need only to know what makes for your joy and peace and comfort, your Lord Jesus.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

Soli Deo Gloria