Sometime when I was growing up I was introduced to Hans Christian Andersen’s story, *The Emperor’s New Clothes*. While I couldn’t have told you the author’s name 2 weeks ago until I looked it up, the story itself is unforgettable – it is such a great picture of how gullible we can be when we put a priority of getting “stuff” in this world and giving in to peer pressure.

The main character is an emperor who loves to look great and loves new clothes. Some con men tap into this craving and vanity by offering to weave him a rare and costly garment that is unique. This excites him especially when they promise that the garment will be invisible to all but the wise and pure in heart. So the delighted emperor hires them and gives them a lot of money. The con men set up their looms and pretend to weave at them for long hours. Some days later, the emperor is curious about the progress, so he sends in an official to see how things are going. The official doesn’t see anything, but not wanting to be thought unwise or impure in heart, the official returns telling about the incredible beauty of the cloth. The weavers then ask for more money. After another period of days, the emperor sends in a different official who also did not see anything but came back with an even more enthusiastic report. When it was nearly “done”, the Emperor went in to see it. Although he saw nothing, he did not want to appear stupid, so he proclaimed the clothing excellent and beautiful. He even gave the weavers medals.

A grand parade was set-up. The con men “dressed up” the emperor and then skipped town with all their money. With nothing actually on, the emperor paraded through town. Although the people didn’t see anything, they also praised this beautiful new clothing so they wouldn’t be thought to be fools or simpletons. This continued until a little child said out-loud, *The emperor has no clothes!* At once, everyone knew the truth, including the emperor. One straight-forward comment by a little child, who was not trying to protect their ego, stripped away the hypocrisy and deception of the entire nation. Everyone had just gone along with what was being falsely promoted because they did not want to be thought of as fools by the other people around. We recognize that peer pressure affects us in our teen years, but Middle Class Americans are even more “peer-influenced”. Just think of some of the things you do or don’t do simply because of what others may think. Can’t have someone over because the house is a mess and what will they think of me. Can’t go to church because I am a mess and what will people think of me. Can’t be honest in my struggles because what will people think of me.

In Romans 1-3, God is waking us up to a different kind of nakedness and deception – our true nature as humans.

**PROPOSITION:** Christian upbringing/knowledge brings many benefits, but it doesn’t give anyone any advantage when standing before the Holy God. We must receive Jesus’ righteousness by faith.

I. Review
A. God's marvelous grace

Every person on planet earth is totally dependent on God and His free gifts. God has clearly revealed Himself in the intricacies of design in & around us; the size, power and grandeur of the Universe around us; the moral code & desires in us which are different than the survival of the fittest. God has even more clearly revealed Himself and His ways through true prophets & teachers, the Bible, and then supremely through Jesus Christ whom He raised bodily from the dead on the third day so there is no question who we should follow. Whether it is life itself, or our uniqueness as creatures made in God’s image, or our inherited abilities or protection or direction or the life-giving energy, atmosphere, oxygen, water and natural resources needed for life, God has generously showered every human on planet earth with far more freely given and undeserved gifts than we could ever imagine!

B. Sin is deeper and more intentional than we see

Naturally, all that grace & mercy should lead us to thankfulness, surrender to the Lord, caring for others, commitment to carry out His desires and a trust His ways are the best. Instead, humans naturally suppress God’s truth, act wickedly, and refuse to honor Him. There is more sin IN US than we realize. We put ourselves and/or other created things first in our lives – the place the true God of the Universe and giver of good gifts should be. Our sin, as humans, is deeper and more intentional than we admit. Like the emperor, we are not honest with how much own sin has corrupted us, hurt others, spoiled the goodness God has placed around us and messed up God’s creation. The biggest problem is not our environment or what is happening to us, but the biggest problem any of us face is our own heart – our own inner sinful desires.

C. The downward progression from continual moral sin

Then last week we took time to see the downward progression that happens when we do the opposite of what God has asked us to do. We did this by looking at the various words for “fool” in the book of Proverbs. Remember “fool” in the Bible refers to moral or spiritual actions & attitudes opposite of God’s way and wisdom. It does not refer to intellectual slowness or embarrassing actions. We saw the natural inclination of humanity is that moral foolishness naturally progresses downward making us more determined to continue our disobedience regardless of the results. Real repentance is what is needed to break that cycle.

So as people, like ourselves, put effort into trying to do what is good, we look around us and see many who are more corrupt, more wicked, more greedy, or more selfish. We agree with God that it is right for Him to condemn and judge them. But in the process we don’t see our own wrong moral actions as God sees them. The same way we judge others will be used on us and we will fail that test. Our good moral actions don’t cover our bad ones anymore than helping our grandmother with chores makes our lying or deceiving OK. Then as Christians, we can wrongly think that we have special religious privilege because of what we do for Jesus. We think God will
overlook our failures because we have gotten baptized or we walked forward at an
event or we go to church or say the Bible is God’s word.

II. Is there an advantage in Christian upbringing? YES Romans 3:1-8
What advantage then is there in baptism, church attendance, speaking about Jesus or
learning the Bible? READ v 1-2. Or let’s phrase this for modern day Christians, “If such
things as water baptism, church membership, doing good or having the Word of God is not
even to ensure our salvation or holiness, what is the advantage of being under the
umbrella of the Church and Christianity?” Whether it is circumcision & being ethnically
Jewish for those in OT times or it is being brought up a Christian today, what value is there
in a godly upbringing or regularly participating now? For the past 30 years, many American
Christians have downplayed faith practices and said all that is important is that you love
Jesus. If, as Romans 2:25-28 says, what really counted then was being “Jewish” inwardly
and your heart being circumcised, what advantage is there in being going through the scorn
& sacrificial actions of being raised a Jew or taking time to learning the Bible in the
Synagogue?

A. We’ve been entrusted with the very words of God Rom 3:1-2 (9:4-5)
Being so strong in salvation by grace alone, in Christ alone through faith alone, we
might expect God’s answer through Paul to be ‘None at all!’ But, to our surprise, the
Bible says, ‘Much in every way.’ READ Rom 3:1-2. There are many advantages,
although only one privilege is actually listed in this chapter. If you want to see more
privileges the Jewish people had, check out Romans 9:4-5 where 8 are mentioned. A
privilege of foremost importance that all Jewish people had was that they have been
entrusted with the very words of God. God not only reveals Himself through the
universe, nature, our uniqueness as humans and the moral law in us, but God also has
spoken to His people. The Jews had those words and that revelation in what we call
the Old Testament. We have the same privilege growing up in a Christian church or
coming to a Christian church later in life as you do – we have been entrusted with the
very words of God – We call those 66 books, the Bible – 39 books in the Old
Testament and 27 books in the New Testament which focuses on Jesus and the gospel.
Having the Word of God is an incredible privilege.

B. What if some Christians walk away? Rom 3:3-4
But what if Jewish people turn away from God’s truth? READ Rom 3:3-4. What if
God’s people who have God’s word turn away from that God? What if Christians
walk away from their Christian upbringing or those who regularly go to church start
living the opposite of what God says? Doesn’t that make the Word of God ineffective?
Doesn’t that mean God isn’t going to do what He said He would do? Not at all! The
main problem of sin is not the bad environment around us, it is our own sinful hearts.
Our sin does not stop God’s work. Even if every person in our country turns away
from Jesus, God is still going to carry out everything He said He would do for His
church. People’s faithlessness never alters God’s faithfulness or frustrates His
purpose. God is always true, no matter how far people who claim to believe Him fall
away! Then Paul quotes from David’s deepest repentance after his sin with Bathsheba
in Psalm 51:4, affirming God’s justice and giving proof that God remains faithful and
ture no matter how individuals may sin. God is true to His word, not only when He
blesses His people according to His promises, but also when He brings judgment on
His people for their disobedience.

C. Doesn’t our wrong actions show God’s holiness more?  
Rom 3:5-6
Some twist God’s responses, accusing God of using peoples’ failings to magnify
Himself. READ v 5-6. If Jewish people’s failures then, showed more clearly God’s
perfection, how can God get upset at that? Don’t our wrong actions show God’s
holiness more? If God can use even the sinful for His purposes, how can that be bad
enough to judge? This objection seems so foolish to Paul that he apologizes for
mentioning it (“I am using a human argument”). As v 6 says, “Certainly not! If that
were so, how could God judge the world?” They wanted God to judge those who
wronged them, hurt them, wronged others or did harmful things. We want that! We
don’t want injustice to win or go unpunished. God will judge the world – but that
includes us! In fact, we, as believers, will face God’s painful discipline quicker than
others in this life because “Shouldn’t God discipline His own children first?” Don’t
go through life thinking you are basically good and the only reason you blow your
top, say mean words, lie or deceive, is because of what happened in the environment
around you. The real problem is the depth of our own sin, no matter how moral, how
nice, how generous or how polite.

D. Why not sin since God brings good from all?  
Rom 3:7-8
Let’s go a step deeper. READ v 7-8. If God brings glory even out of our sin; If God’s
grace is unleashed more where there is more sin; then why are any of my sins (which I
see as less than the people around me) being condemned. God is getting His glory,
some good is happening, therefore what I do or don’t do shouldn’t matter that much.
It’s not a big deal. Isn’t that a common thought behind our traditional American
thinking, that as long as we believe in some God and do some good things, then God
should be happy with us. He shouldn’t get upset at the places we don’t carry out His
wishes perfectly. This line of thinking is so off-base that it stands self-condemned. It
is such a contradiction in terms. “Their condemnation is just!” Justification by faith
alone in Jesus absolutely insists, and requires, that some “fruit of repentance”, some
actions of change, follow any forgiveness by God or it isn’t true repentance.

III. Is there an advantage in Christian upbringing? NO  
Romans 3:9-20
Was there any advantage in being a circumcised Jew in Jesus’ day? Is there any advantage
of going to church today? Absolutely! But that is only half the answer. READ v 9 (we =
circumcised Jew). Is there any advantage in Christian upbringing or going to church? NO!
Paul, make up your mind – is going to church an advantage or not? Notice we have two
different answers to the very same question! Both pieces, both answers, are necessary to
understand the truth. That is why so many recent statements made by Christians of not
needing to be part of a local church or not needing to obey God’s actual rules are false.

They only take one side!
A. All humans are enslaved to sin  
Rom 3:9
Going to church regularly or having a Christian upbringing or following Jesus’ moral ways or caring for others bring great advantages into our lives, BUT it doesn’t solve our biggest problem. SIN – not just sins we do, but our sin nature. We know this is the focus in v 9 because it says “Jews and Gentiles alike are under the power of sin”. No human faith activity or action can give us right standing before God. Whether we have the privilege of growing up in a Christian home or we never heard anything about the Bible we all stand guilty of sin before God – worthy to be punished and unworthy to go to heaven. Privileges or no privileges, Christian background or non-Christian background, regular church attendance or wanting any mention of Jesus silenced, we all equally stand in need of God’s grace and mercy. We need Jesus’ righteousness to be credited to us more than we realize. Our sinful desires deep in us are constantly trying to corrupt any action we do. If sin were the color blue, every aspect of us would have some shade of blue in it. Or as the Russian poet said, “I don’t know what the heart of a bad man is like, but I do know what the heart of a good man is like and it is terrible.” That “terrible” is in light of holy perfection & totally selfless love.

B. Evidence of depth of corruption from 6 Old Testament passages  
Rom 3:10-18
(Ps 14:1-3; Ps 5:9; Ps 140:3; Ps 10:7; Isa 59:7-8; Ps 36:1)
Like the story of the emperor’s clothes, no positive change can come, no turning away from going foolish directions can happen until “the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth” is genuinely recognized. To validate this claim that every human sins (including those who seek to live moral lives and those who claim to follow the true God) and that we all not only do sins but that sin itself has power over us – we are given 14 “sweeping statements” from 6 Old Testament passages. This starts with a picture of our depraved character. Quoting from different parts of Ps 14:1-3, we see READ v 10-12. Those words, “no one” and “all”, are constantly repeated so there is no doubt serious sin is in every human being deep down in our character. Comparing ourselves to others may make us feel better, but we are going to stand before the perfection, all-knowing and holiness of God. He is going to say to us, “You are just a patient person who blew up at others because they wouldn’t stop” – God is going to reveal the truth that if impatience comes out, it was because we have more impatience or self-centeredness deep within us than we realize. Selfishness and sinful pride is strong in every one of us and it wants to corrupt even our good actions.

Starting in v 13, we move from our character to our conduct. Notice the various body parts mentioned and how they have all been corrupted by sin. READ v 13-18. Whether it is what we say, where we go, what we do, what we see or even how to get along with others, there is corruption by sin that accompanies it. In other words, sin affects all areas of our being including who we are and what we do. We sin because we are sinners by nature. I rarely if ever heard either my mom or mother-in-law swear, until Alzheimer’s disease took down the filters that kept any inward cursing from
coming out. They didn’t learn to swear when they were old — that corruption was always deep in them. They spent their life working hard to not let that corruption come out in their words. Our character is sinful, our conduct is sinful, and the cause is a loss of the right & powerful “fear of God” (which we are discussing/discussed in adult Sunday School today). The sin corruption makes us miserable inside and we struggle with maintaining peaceful relationships with everyone — we don’t carry out the way of peace.

C. Every human is contaminated (not righteous)  
Rom 3:19-20  
People who grew up in church, know the Bible well or are now in the church & learning the Bible are sinners just as those who don’t care about God or never went to church. We are all contaminated — none of us is righteous. READ Rom 3:19-20.  
Sidenote: notice that phrase in v 19 “Whatever the law says”. That refers to the preceding scriptural quotes. But if you look at the list I have given you in subpoint 3B, those quotes aren’t out the first 5 books of the Old Testament which is often called “The Law”. Those Bible quotes are out of the Prophets and Psalms which are the other two major sections of the Jewish Bible. Clearly there are times when the whole Old Testament is considered THE LAW in a general sense, just as the first 5 books of the Bible are considered THE LAW in a stricter sense. (End of sidenote)

The root cause of man’s problem is not the environment a person is raised in but their own wicked and selfish heart. Do we believe that? Sometimes it seems like we are becoming ‘determinists’ — whatever happens around us determines what we are and do — so it is not my fault. God did not make us robots, nor do we merely respond to instinct like animals. God gave us the capacity of moral choice and genuinely being able to make decisions, not just have them forced on us. We can freely choose our actions. If we don’t take ownership for that we are going to be like the emperor walking around with no clothes. If we are always blaming others or circumstances, then we are still enslaved to our own sinful nature. When we see how deep our sin is, we truly begin to understand that our only and greatest hope is in the mercy of God.

No one is good enough, no one is innocent enough, no one has sacrificed enough, no one is important enough, no one has helped others enough, no one knows enough and no one has achieved enough to be eligible for heaven. In school examinations, the passing grade in a certain subject might be 50, 60 or 70 percent. But in terms of the righteousness required for any human to get into paradise forever and not face judgement, the pass mark is 100 per cent! Anything less is a failure. When we have done the best we can, we still fall short of God’s holy standard. We cannot get 100% because sin is so ingrained in any of us. We can’t establish our own righteousness by trying to balance our present good deeds against our past failures. But we can recognize that sin and accept God’s free gift of total cleansing by having Jesus pay the penalty of our sins and Jesus’ righteous be credited to our account.
God doesn’t come down hard here because He is out to destroy us – that is the goal of satan and the demonic. God loves us and wants to free us from the bondage of our own sin deep inside us. God clearly sees we are naked and believing a lie just like the emperor was. So God freely offers what we need to change. Sure we will feel embarrassed at first – sure we will feel ashamed – sure we will try to avoid, bury and forget the truth – sure we will try to blame others or our situation, but when we come “just as we are” in simple repentance and faith in Jesus, God will receive us, welcome us, pardon us, cleanse us and relieve us. God freely gives us a new nature and shows us the direction to strengthen & develop that new nature. God freely gives us His Holy Spirit inside us – which will always promote true HOLINESS. God freely blesses us and leads us on a path that brings great good long term. So don’t believe the lies around that humans are basically good or that our biggest problem is what is happening TO us or that all we need to please God is put some effort in and be sincere. No, we are all in a hopeless state naturally. That is why we need God to convert us not just make us a little better. It is why we need God to transform us, not just help us to a few more good things. Now that is real hope – that leads to an abundant life – and that frees us from sin even as we will battle it until we die. More on this miracle of being justified by faith next week. Let’s sing this truth in #306.