

“The Heathen Without Excuse”

Romans 1:18-23

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I. Introduction

- A. Paul has now completed his introduction to Romans
 - 1. His Salutation (vv. 1-7)
 - 2. His Personal Communication (vv. 8-15)
 - 3. His Transition to the main theme “The Gospel” or “Good News” (vv. 16-17)
- B. As powerful as this gospel is, there is one thing that it cannot do; it cannot save until a man sees himself a guilty, lost, and condemned sinner!
- C. Having announced the Universal Gospel (v. 16), Paul now proceeds to show that there is a universal need for that Gospel
- D. If God sent His Son, it’s because the world is lost in sin. Man’s need of salvation is seen in the simple fact that there is a Savior
 - 1. If no one is drowning, why launch the lifeboat?
 - 2. If no one is sick, why send for the doctor?
 - 3. If no one is lost, why preach the Gospel? (The common view today)
- E. So, before the “Good News” - the “Bad News”
 - 1. The weakness of much preaching today
 - 2. “Love of God;” but what about the “Wrath of God”?
- F. We come now to the first doctrinal section of Romans called:
 - 1. Condemnation – The Wrath of God revealed
 - a) Before the righteousness of God is revealed in salvation (v. 17)
 - b) We see God’s wrath revealed in condemnation (v. 18)
 - 1) (Chapters 1:18-3:30)
- G. In this section the question that is asked is: “Is the world lost?”
 - 1. The answer is yes! “All the world is guilty before God” (v. 3:19)
 - 2. It’s not a very pretty picture, but it’s important for us to understand
- H. Paul is now saying: “Hear ye! Hear ye! Court is now in session!”
 - 1. The first group Paul calls into the courtroom is “the pagan” or “heathen Gentiles” (Who are they?)
 - a) We see that they are “without excuse” (v. 1:20)
 - b) Curtis Vaughan about Romans verses 1:18-23 – The intent of these verses is to show that God’s wrath upon the Gentile world is justified. That is, it is fitting and proper in spite of the fact that that segment of the world had, in Paul’s day, never heard the gospel. The justness of the divine wrath springs from two facts: (1) that God has revealed Himself to all mankind (vv. 19-20); and (2) man has rejected that revelation (vv. 21-23). In other words, the heathen are not condemned for failure to live up to a revelation they do not possess; they are condemned because they have failed to live up to the light they do have.
 - 2. Now note the “two reasons the heathen are without excuse”

II. They knew God, but Suppressed the Truth (Romans 1:18-20)

- A. Note: (v. 18) – “Hold the truth”
 - 1. (v. 19) – “Known of God is manifest”

2. (v. 19) – “God hath shewed it unto them”
 3. (v. 20) – “Clearly seen being understood”
 4. and: (v. 21) – “They knew God”
- B. They Clearly Knew God, but what does that mean?
1. Not redemption; it’s revelation
 2. God has given every man a twofold revelation of Himself
 - a) Conscience (v. 19) – “In them”
 - b) Creation (v. 19) – “Unto them”
- C. God’s Wrath is Revealed (v. 18)
1. What is the wrath of God?
 - a) It’s not – An impulsive outburst of anger aimed capriciously at people who God does not like
 - b) Rather - It’s the settled, determined response of a righteous God against sin
 - c) God is holy and righteous. His wrath is His holy hostility to evil. His refusal to condone it or come to terms with it
 - d) But rather His just judgment upon it
 - 1) Seen in the Bible – Sodom & Gomorrah; The Flood
 - 2) Sowing and reaping – Natural Law & Moral Law
 - 3) Seen at Calvary
 - e) Further wrath – Book of Revelation (Chapters 6-19)
 - 1) Note: (v. 18) – Literally “is being revealed” – Now!
 - 2) How? (v. 24) – “God gives up”
 2. Who is God’s wrath against? (v. 18)
 - a) “All ungodliness” – toward God
 - b) “Unrighteousness” – toward man
 - c) Why? They literally “hold down” the truth (v. 18)
 - 1) Or “suppress the truth” (v. 18)
 - 2) Illustration – Little boy - hiding dog in toy box
 - 3) Why? – Conscience (v. 19)
 - 4) How? – Creation (v. 20)
 3. People often ask: “What about the heathen in the jungle without a Bible?”
 - a) Answer: God’s general revelation in creation (v. 20)
 - 1) It’s in the present tense! Continuous
 - 2) It’s universal
 - b) Psalm 19:1-4 - The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.
 - c) There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun.
 4. Two things about God known through Creation (v. 20)
 - a) His Power – “Eternal power” (v. 20)
 - 1) His Nature – “Godhead” (v. 20)
 - b) The creation reveals the Creator
 - 1) The natural; the supernatural
 - 2) The visible; the invisible
 - c) So, “without excuse” or literally, “apology” (v. 20)
 - 1) No justification for “atheism” or “agnosticism” or “skepticism”
 - 2) No defense on judgment day

- 3) Because they did not live up to the knowledge they had
- 4) Knowledge brings responsibility

III. They Glorified Him Not as God Perverted the Truth (Romans 1:21-23)

A. Man's Steps Downward

1. Indifference (v. 21) – “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God,” or NLT - “Wouldn’t worship him as God”
2. Ingratitude (v. 21) – “Neither were thankful”
3. Ignorance (vv. 21-22) – NLT – “They began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools” (They made nonsense out of logic)
 - a) (v. 22) “Wise” – literally, “sophos”
 - b) (v. 22) “Fools” – literally, “morons” – in living

B. True Wisdom Starts with God, and a Fear or Reverence for God

1. Illustration: Sir Isaac Newton
2. George Washington Carver - “Mr. Creator, why did You make the peanut?” Many years later, he shared that God led him back to his laboratory and worked with him to discover some 300 marketable products from the peanut, including lard, mayonnaise, cheese, shampoo, instant coffee, flour, soap, face powder, plastics, adhesives, axle grease, and pickles. Likewise, from the sweet potato he made more than 100 discoveries, among them starch, library paste, vinegar, shoe blacking, ink, and molasses. These new products created a demand for peanuts and sweet potatoes. Economists and agriculturalists agree that Carver contributed more than any other individual to rejuvenate the Southern economy.
3. Carver died in 1943 and was buried with the epitaph, “He could have added fortune to fame, but caring for neither, he found happiness and honor in being helpful to the world.”

C. Idolatry (v. 23)

1. The Ten Commandments
 - a) Thou shalt have no other god’s before me
 - b) Thou shalt not make any graven images
 - c) Note the folly of idolatry! It leads to “immorality”
 - 1) Evolutionists say religion developed in a process like this: When man was primitive (when he had graduated from the ape tribe, lost his tail, quit climbing trees), he felt an impulse to worship something, so he took a stick, carved out an image, and began to worship that. That was the first step. As his intellectual powers grew, he began to make moral distinctions, saying, “This is right, and that is wrong.” The next step in his reasoning process was to realize that the rain and the seasons must come from one or more superhuman beings and so he gave thanks to the gods for their gifts. From that point he rose to the conception of the true God and became a monotheist.
2. So man has not evolved upward in his understanding of God
3. These ancient people took a path of seven steps downward:
 - a) They knew God, but refused to honor Him. “Knowing God, they glorified Him not as God.”

- b) They were not thankful for God's goodness to them. "Neither gave thanks."
- c) They began speculating foolishly. "Became vain in their reasonings"
- d) Their minds became senseless and darkened. "Their senseless heart was darkened"
- e) They thought they were wise. "Professing themselves to be wise"
- f) In reality, they had become very foolish. "They became fools"
- g) Instead of worshipping the eternal God, they preferred idols patterned after mortal man. "They changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man."

IV. Salvation End

- A. How does man get back to God?
- B. He will not find his own way back
- C. Jesus – The greatest revelation of God
 - 1. Jesus said: I am...
 - a) The Way
 - b) The Truth
 - c) The Life
- D. John 1:12-13 - But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.