

Romans 1:20-23 **How Gentiles Suppress the Truth of God**

The book of Romans chapter 1 verses 18 through 25. Actually I will start at 17:

17) For in it is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it has been written, "The just (or *righteous*) shall live from out of faith."

18) For the wrath of God is being revealed from Heaven against (or *upon*) all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, the ones who are suppressing the truth in unrighteousness,

19) because (or *on account of that*) that which may be known of God is manifest (or *made visible* or *clear*) in them, for God has manifested *it* to them.

20) For the invisible things (or *attributes*) of Him from *the* creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood (or *perceived*) by the things made, that is: creation. The invisible things... even His eternal power and Godhead, (His existence, His character) so that they are without excuse,

21) because, that when they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, neither were they thankful, but they became empty (or *vain*) in their imaginations - it is literally the word *dialogues*, the dialogues of their mind became purposeless and empty - and their foolish heart - the word *foolish* means *without understanding* - and their heart that is without understanding became darkened.

22) While professing themselves to be wise, they became foolish, (that is where we get our English word *moron* from: foolish)

23) and they changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into the likeness of an image of corruptible man -- and of birds and of four-footed beasts and of creeping things.

24) Wherefore God also gave them up (literally *over*) to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies among themselves,

25) who changed the truth of God into the lie, (in the Greek text it is the definite article) and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

The book of Romans, Paul writing to the Christians in Rome whom he has never seen before. But writing in such a way so as to minister to the mind-set or the frame of mind of the Romans, which is according to their legal system. Everything had to be proved, proven through the legal system to the Roman mind. And what is a blessing to us, one of the blessings to us, is that Paul was able to share about the judicial system of God by ministering along those lines. Because Romans is presented as a legal brief. And in it he establishes all of the doctrines of the Christian faith. And this is the justice system, this is the court room scene where Paul is

presenting before man and before the court of God, God's justice system. We as Gentiles, we are ignorant of what God's justice system is. We need to find out about His justice system.

The word *righteousness*, the Greek word for that is the same word, not only for *righteousness* but for *justice*, or *just*, and even *justify*. It all means the same thing. It is a judicial term and it means *to line up with*. In fact, an old English word for margin came from this, where the margin would all line up on the left-hand side of the page. And it means to be right with someone, to be lined with someone.

Verse 17, says **In it** (that is, the gospel) **the righteousness of God is being revealed from out of faith to faith; as it has been written, "The just (or righteous man) shall live from out of faith."** I am declared righteous by faith. I Corinthians chapter 1 verses 30 and 31 tell us that Christ is our righteousness. I cannot be right with God unless it is through Jesus Christ. He is the only one. So, and it is interesting verse 17 says, **And in it is the righteousness of God being revealed**, right now, presently. His righteousness, His justice system is being revealed.

Verse 18, **For the wrath of God is being revealed**, same word, same tense. And last week as we shared with you *the wrath of God* is a term by Paul that is used twice by Paul - three times actually, here and two other places - and it represents not heated anger, not an emotional response of Him getting angry. That would be the word **qumov** (thumos), where we get a word *thermal* from. This word for *wrath* and the phrase *wrath of God* represents a law, a moral law that God has put into play within life. Just like within the physical realm the law of gravity has been established, it is a law. You go up on the roof and jump off you will find out that the law is in place. It will happen without anybody doing anything. Well, the wrath of God is built in to His righteous or justice system. That when people do certain things that violate His righteousness or His righteous system or justice system they experience the wrath of God.

And it says in our text, **The wrath of God is right now being revealed upon all ungodliness**. The word *ungodly* means *to lack reverence for God*, and **unrighteousness**, it just means to live in violation of God's law. Not just the Ten Commandments but God's entire design for holiness and His will for somebody's life. *Unrighteousness* means *to live in a way that is not lined up with the Lord*. So, **The wrath of God is being revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men**.

And then we are told about the particulars about these men that give us the cause for God's judgment, **The ones who are suppressing the truth in unrighteousness**. The word *suppressing* literally means *to hold down* and it is a participial form. People who are constantly and continually suppressing the truth that God is revealing to them while they continue on in unrighteousness. So the wrath of God kicks in and comes upon those who have had the truth of God revealed to them and they continue to live in unrighteousness and they suppress the truth, and God's wrath kicks in.

Verses 18 through 32 have to do with how God or how the gospel reaches the Gentiles. There is not anything about the Jews in this section. In chapter 2 verse 1 through chapter 3 verse 8 we will talk about the Jewish person who is judging the Gentile according to the law. Well, he too is judged and he is going to be told that. And then in chapter 3 verses 9 to 20 the summary

statement of how everyone has fallen short of the glory of God, a summary statement. But verses 18 to 22 have to do with the Gentile. It is interesting about the Gentile what God has done. We are going to over the course of this week and next week, we are going to mention to you several steps and principles that explain God's process of reaching the Gentile.

Number one in verses 19 through 23 we have the character of man. We are studying God's communication. It says, **Because that which may be known of God is manifested in them; for God manifested it to them.** The word *manifest* again has to do with taking light and *bringing something to light*. So it is taking something that was in the dark and making it known or visible. This is what God has done. God has chosen certain aspects about Himself to be revealed to man, to be manifested to man. It is his communication to the human race.

Maybe not to our minds but to our spirit, to our conscience and that is point number two. He has manifested it literally in them, and He has manifested it to our conscience. The word *conscience* in Greek just basically means that part of our life that has gathered knowledge. It is like the little black box on the airplane. We have one of those and once we know the truth it is there. It stays there and we have to figure out what to do with it. Whether you are going to surrender to it or suppress it? But God communicates and He communicates to our conscience, to within us.

Verse 20 the third thing is, the very content of His communication. The concept is that which may be known of God are **the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made.** The concept is the invisible things of God. It kind of sounds contradictory. If they are invisible things how can you see them clearly? God takes those things that are invisible to the human being and makes them visible. And we will see at the end of verse 20 that the two things that God has made visible about Himself is His eternal power and Godhead. His power, His authority, and His Godhead, that is, His deity. He exists as God, that there is a God; and secondly, He is the all-powerful one. And according to the Scriptures every single person has been illuminated to this truth. Now the concept of the invisible things of God are revealed through Creation. That is the way God has designed it.

One of these days I hope that in one of our classes we can start going through the book of Genesis again. I think it has been probably thirty-five years or so since we have gone through it. But our studies from there we showed how each day of creation God created things on that day that represented His character and His nature, to remind and to leave behind or leave with us a witness and testimony about Himself.

As I said to you last week it is a shame we get so busy on the horizontal that in the evening time we do not stop to look up and see the vast universe and realize that is His testimony to us that He exists and He is the all-powerful One. It is from nature. We saw from Psalm 19 verse 1, **The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament** (that is, the expanse of the heavens) **shows his handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.** We are not talking about books. We are not talking about literature. We are not talking about human language. There is a testimony that comes from creation that speaks to the heart of man. (Verse

4) **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.** Stars are like a Tabernacle that is used for the sun. And we show in our study from day of creation day 4 that the Sun was placed in its relationship with the earth and with the moon. And Malachi picked that up and said that Jesus Christ is the Sun of righteousness, S-U-N. So what we gain from the sun, physical sun, the light, the warmth, life itself is all symbolized by how God created things. He left behind a message.

And I have told you before, and some people kind of freaked out about it but I will mention it again. Some people think that I teach telling fortunes and horoscopes and everything else. But the horoscope is actually a perversion of something that the Jews held from Genesis chapter 1. That all twelve stages of the stars actually present the gospel message beginning with the virgin birth of Christ and going all way to His second coming. That is how the Jews, from Genesis chapter 1, it says that the stars were put in the heavens for seasons and for times and for signs. They were put there for signs. And there was actually a gospel message that they saw in the stars. And it is kind of interesting that people all over the earth, if they are paying attention, their hearts are open, God is going to show them, not only the existence of God but the actual gospel message in and through Jesus Christ.

Now for you Greek buffs, in verse 20 the word *invisible* and the word for *clearly seen* come from the same root. That is a play on words. **The invisible things of Him are clearly seen**, as if it is a contradiction. But it seems like Paul used those things on purpose.

Fourthly, at the end of verse 20 the conclusion. That both His eternal power and Godhead are clearly seen - here is the purpose clause: **for them to be without excuse**. Well, where is the Bible in there? Where is the gospel message that is given by human beings?

Remember, this is the starter point. It is not promoting the fact that you do not need the Scriptures and you do not need fellowship etc. etc. The initial basic process that God uses to reach a non-Jewish person is through creation, the testimony of creation. And every single Gentile when they stand before God they will stand without excuse. Because they will say, "Well, the Bible was never translated into my language." Or, "The pastor in the church down the street was a hypocrite." God is going to judge them according to how they responded to God's illuminating light manifesting God's existence and His power to that person's spirit or mind. They do not have to have a knowledge of it. How did their spirit respond? We saw from John chapter 3 that man will be responsible for how he responded to the light not whether he understood the Bible or not. How he responds to the light.

Fifthly, as we begin verse 21, the progression now. The progression of things. The word *because that* is building off of the other verse. There is a progression of one verse building upon another as we go through this up through verse 32. We will not do 32 today. Before we saw the character of man; now we see the condition of man. God has illuminated their hearts to their conscience of every person so that they are without excuse. But as we see in verse 21 there is a change. Number five, the fifth principle is that there is a change.

First of all, **after having known God**. This is after the stage when that which may be known of God is manifested to them they do six things.

1) **They do not glorify Him as God.**

They do not give Him the honor. They do not ascribe to God to be the very substance of life and value of the universe. And the opposite of that expression is pride. God cannot be God if I think highly of myself and I do not want his intervention in my life. I lead my own life. I believe what I want to believe.

2) **Nor are they thankful.**

You say, "What? You have to give thanks at the meal or what are you talking about?" This is the attitude of giving thanks to God for His provision rather than complaining. It is the opposite of complaining. Being thankful to Him for His provision for His care over us.

3) **But they became empty.**

The word *vain* means *empty, worthless, purposeless in their thinking*. Once you reject the truth of God the purpose for your thinking is just absolutely worthless. It might even be intellectual. It might even be intellectually stimulating, but it is worthless.

Psalm 14:1 uses this: **The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."** There have been several times we have had opportunity to tell people who scoffed at the things of God, "Do you know you are in the Bible?"

"Ah! No way."

"Yeah. It says in Psalm 14:1 and Psalm 53:1 that the fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' You are in the Bible."

They have become empty in their imaginations. The word *imaginations* is **dialogismov** (dialogismos), *dialogue*, their reasonings. They are empty.

4) **Their foolish heart was darkened.**

The word *foolish* means *without understanding*. Their heart that has no understanding about spiritual things was darkened. The illumination is gone. The enlightenment is gone.

5) **While professing to be wise, here's the intellectualism, While professing to be wise they became foolish.** It is where we get our word *moron* from. It means to be a fool. And God is just so good. He is just so smart. The Mormon religion teaches that the Angel Moroni came down and manifested the truth of Joseph Smith. Well *Moroni* means *moron*. That is the angel's name so you should know it from that.

6) And verse 23, **They changed the glory of the incorruptible God in the likeness of the image of corruptible man, and of birds, and of four-footed beasts, and of creeping things.** The next step is this change that takes place. They suppress the truth. They reject the Enlightenment. And they do not glorify God, they do not thank Him, they become foolish in the reasonings. Their heart that is without understanding becomes

darkened again. They profess to be wise but they really have become foolish. And sixthly they change the glory of incorruptible God in the likeness of the image of corruptible man. They become religious. They change who God really is into the God that they want. Hence we had the religions of the world.

The book of Psalms tells us that to those who do not worship the true and living God who worshiped those images made out of wood and stone, that if you worship them you will become like them. Psalm 115 verse 8 and Psalm 135 verses 15 to 18 tell us that when man decides to change the glory of God into a God that they make up and worship that we become like those that we worship. They said of Jesus that He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of demons. Beelzebub was one of the Philistines gods. It means *lord of the flies*. And what they would do is - even with grasshoppers - they would worship anything that might harm their crops or come up against them. They would worship the grasshopper so the grasshopper might have mercy on them and not eat their crops. Fear. Worshiping the creation, the creature more than the Creator.

Next week we will pick up at verse 24, but this condition of man who rejects the illumination, enlightenment of God's Spirit we will see a continual process of the condition of man's heart getting worse and worse, even to the point where graphically it presents homosexuality and lesbianism at the end. There is a judgment against the body and there is a judgment against the mind. The wrath of God is being revealed. And when a person, a Gentile especially, rejects the illumination of God as He reveals Himself through creation, through nature, once that person rejects Christ - that is what *reprobate* means by the way. *Reprobate* means *to reject*. Once a person reaches the point they have rejected the true and living God, God gives them a mind to reject all truth. They cannot even know truth even if they wanted to, because God gives them over.

We will see that three times. Verses 24, 26, and 28, it says, **God gives them over** and it is a progression downward into corruption. Where God actually says, "If you are going to choose corruption, I will give you over to corruption." And I think that it is something that we need to understand. It is a law in God's justice system that is being carried out today and we need to understand it for ourselves as well as how God judges the world.

Now the Jew in chapter 2 he is judged the same way. He is also going to be judged by the enlightenment given to him. But his enlightenment is going to come through the law. For the Gentile it is the conscience, and for the Jew it is the law. They have been given the law. The Gentile is totally ignorant of the law and what it is for. We do not study the law. We have our various religious groups, Protestant and Catholic groups. It does not have anything to do with Judaism or following the law. So we have to learn.

This is the process by which God reaches the Gentiles. It is His designed plan and we need to understand it. This is The Doctrine of Condemnation. That also is a judicial term. It means to pronounce sentence against somebody. And we are seeing that God has pronounced sentence against us. That there is a judgment that is taking place right now. There will be a judgment that takes place during the tribulation period. And there will be the final judgment as

we stand before the throne of God. So it is not to be just in the future, that is going to be the permanent. Right now is going to be the judgment of God upon us in our rejection.

And chapter 2 is going to tell us it is because the goodness of God leads us to repentance. He judges us, He causes us to experience judgment now so that we will repent, and turn, and seek Him, and surrender to Him. As we said the first hour, those people who are being destroyed by the fire we should be right there to pull them out of the fire if they call out for help, and there are people that do that. But people asked the question, "How can God do that to people?" Chapter 2 it is called the goodness of God. He is causing them - the one principle that I told you about from Galatians chapter 6 verses 7 and 8, **Do not be deceived, God is not mocked that whatsoever man sows that he shall also reap.** If people reject the truth of God, they will reap what they have sown. The wrath of God that is now being poured out on man and we need to understand all of those stages as we go through these texts.

Let's close with prayer.