

Romans (1:18-23)

Three Counts of Godlessness

Part 3 - June 20, 2004

PAINTED TRUTH

If you were dropped to earth and asked to describe its creator from what you can see, you might come to several conclusions:

- He's powerful [lightning] and fearsome [ash cloud]
- He's amazing [volcano] and astonishing [glacier]
- He's colorful [autumn tree] and artistic [peacock]
- He's meticulous [dandelion] and attentive [dragon-fly]
- He's humorous [chimpanzee] and creative [stick bug]
- He's affectionate [elephant baby] and tender [goose baby]
- And above all He's eternal [galaxy and stars]

His truth is painted all over our planet. Every morning begins with a sunrise ... I'm told! For us night-owls who've never seen one first hand ... He made sunsets! God has littered the earth with evidence of His existence.

We read (last week) in Paul's *greeting* that he had a message:

- A message he was eager and excited to share
- A message he felt obligated and compelled to reveal
- A message he was unashamed of and would pull no punches

And he doesn't! Paul empties both barrels, on man's extreme need for God's salvation; whether Hebrew, heathen, or hypocrite.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 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. 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. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. - **Romans 1:18-23 NIV**

TWO OBJECTS OF WRATH

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness ... - **Romans 1:18 NIV**

Let's not get the wrong idea about God's wrath. There's no question it's fearsome and awful ... but it's also loving.

Q: When you see somebody hurting someone else, does it upset you?

Q: Can you imagine watching Schindler's List and not feeling infuriation over the cruelty those people suffered?

- A lack of anger can reveal a lack of compassion.

Notice that God's wrath is not aimed at people, but at the sin that brings suffering – the **godlessness** and the **wickedness** of men (that wounds and destroys His creation).

- If God didn't get angry He wouldn't be worth worshipping.

Take a look at those two objects of God's wrath:

A. *Godlessness* is living without concern for God

Not necessarily atheism; you can believe in God and still speak and/or act as though He doesn't exist (or matter). We justify certain acts (because they don't seem to hurt anyone) yet we know they violate the code of righteousness

- Like pirating software or downloading songs illegally.
- Or calling in sick, when you're not really sick.

Ken: I've only done that once.

Bruce: [Pointing] And lying!

B. *Wickedness* means living without concern for Man

This means not caring how our words and our actions harm others.

THREE ACCUSATIONS OF WRONG

I limited today's study to six verses; because in them Paul charges mankind with three counts of Godlessness (next time he'll take on wickedness). Remember, Paul's purpose is to demonstrate our need for Christ.

He brings his first charge against mankind: they deliberately "**suppress the truth**"

1. Mankind suppresses and represses the truth - they ignore it, deny it, and/or bury it in their subconscious.

Q: You ever do that? You want something really bad ... and there's an easy way to get it – if you just *overlook* what's right?

When I was about nine years old, I wanted to taste the communion wafers in my old church. Only adults were allowed to eat them. So, I snuck into the communion preparation room and stole a package of them. I took it home and ate them. They were awful! No flavor at all. Even jam didn't help! Then I began to feel guilty. I had stolen from God! So, I robbed my piggy bank and snuck back into the communion room, and put some money on the shelf where the wafers had been. But that didn't ease my conscience much. I had to ask and receive God's forgiveness.

- Truth traumatizes sinners until they come clean.

Sometimes it seems much easier to live with a “little” lie than to deal with the truth, or to give up a sense of control.

Now Paul gives us the overwhelming evidence as to why mankind is so guilty:

... since what may be known about God is plain to them, because **God has made it plain to them**. 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**. - **Romans 1:19-20 NIV**

Q: Who will be able to say that there were no clues?

- In our *universe* we see a powerful, intelligent creator.
- In our *sense of right and wrong* we see a moral creator.
- In our *affection* we see a personal, relational creator.

A. It’s unmistakable – “**God has made it plain to them**”

Q: Why do we feel closer to God in the great outdoors?

A: He created nature to reveal Himself – and it works.

Whether we gaze through a telescope or peer through a microscope we see a well-organized, systematic exhibition of His handiwork.

B. It’s undeniable – “**men are without excuse**”

On judgment day no one will say: “I didn’t know!” But many will say: “I didn’t bow!” And there’ll be unfathomable regret.

TWO MORE COUNTS

Not only does man *repress* the truth ...

2. Mankind *rejects* the truth

For although they knew God, they **neither glorified him** as God **nor gave thanks** to him ... - **Romans 1:21a NIV**

There’re two ways mentioned here that mankind rejects God:

A. They refuse to give Him credit – “**they neither glorify Him**”

It’s just as “scientific” (scholarly) to believe in a creation *with* a creator as it is to believe in one *without*. In fact, believing that an infinite, well-ordered, unending, systematic, life-sustaining creation has no causer - no creator - requires far more faith than simply acknowledging the obvious.

- Yet, secular evolutionists refuse to give *any* credit to God.

One reason absolute evolution has such a hypnotic effect is because it offers a working *hypothesis* for atheism. Remember, many philosophies and theories were created (in part) to excuse the immorality of the instructors.

B. They refuse to give Him thanks - “**nor gave thanks**”.

Q: Doesn't it hurt when you go out of your way to do something kind for someone, and they don't express any gratitude?

- Ungratefulness *is* ungodliness.

There were these twelve-year-old girls at a middle school. They'd put on their lipstick and then leave lip prints on the bathroom mirror. So, an announcement was made to please stop doing this, as it's quite difficult for the janitor to clean. But, they kept doing it. So, a sign was put up: Please appreciate how difficult it is to clean this mirror. But, they kept doing it. So, the principle brought all of the girls into the restroom along with the janitor. The principle said, "I'd like you girls to watch the janitor clean the mirror, so you can appreciate what all is involved. As the girls watched on, the janitor sprayed some soap on the mirror, took out his squeegee, dipped it into the toilet, and scrubbed the mirror clean. That stopped it!

- When we fail to appreciate, we end up regretting it.

Q: Do you consistently acknowledge (glorify) and appreciate God?

3. Mankind *represses*, and *rejects*, and ultimately: Mankind *replaces* the truth

... but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. - **Romans 1:21b-23 NIV**

They're not *stupid*, they're stubborn; and their stubbornness causes them to concoct foolish alternative belief systems that won't require repentance, remorse, confession, or humility.

Although idols were venerated and worshipped, they ultimately existed to grant the wishes of their maker. It used to be: a good harvest, fertility, and security. Now it's: financial success, selfish pleasure, and ego.

Things really haven't changed that much. An idol is just something that takes God's rightful place (and dethrones Him).

- Man *conceives* the idol and the idol *deceives* the man.

Q: What types of things do you tend to prioritize above God?

- The further we get from the light the darker it gets.

One last thing about nature, it's unforgiving (survival of the fittest and all). It only serves to point us toward a creator. Creation may display His handiwork, but Calvary demonstrates His heart.

That is, His love, forgiveness, and the promise of eternal life. And God has a remedy for those who repress, reject, and replace: recognize the Creator; receive your Redeemer; and revere the one true God.