

The Whole World Is Guilty Before God

Romans 1:18-23

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Background Notes

In the epistle to the Romans we have the good news and the bad news. The good news is that God loves us and has provided a way of salvation for sinful humanity. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross for our sins so that when we believe in Him, we can be declared righteous before a holy God and be with Him in heaven. The penalty for sin is death -- but the Lord Jesus took that penalty when He died as our substitute. This is the good news -- this is the gospel! Anyone and everyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ receives salvation. Look back at verse 16: *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”* This is the good news!

The bad news is that **everyone** is guilty before God! Everyone has sinned, and the wrath of God is directed against sin. *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...”* The wrath of God is not a pleasant subject -- it's a lot more pleasant to think of the love of God! But the wrath of God is real, and it is *“revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.”*

Think of how we see the wrath of God revealed against sin in the Bible. Do you remember the great Flood in Noah's day? Genesis 6:5 says, *“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”* The wrath of God was unleashed against the wickedness of the world at that time, and only Noah and his family were preserved. Remember how the wrath of God was revealed against Sodom and Gomorrah? The wrath of God destroyed those wicked cities for their sin. Think of what our Lord said in Matthew 24 about the coming tribulation, where God's wrath will be revealed against mankind's sin. Matthew 24:21-22: *“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. ²² And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.”*

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men -- and **no one** has an excuse! Romans 1:20 says *“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse...”* So "they" (that is everyone) are **without excuse**. If ever there was a passage in the Bible that deals with a question of “What about the heathen?” or “What about the people who have never heard about Christ?” – this is it: Romans 1:18.

Doctrinal Points

1. God does not condemn people for ignorance of the truth.

You **never** read in the Bible -- **anywhere!** -- that God condemned someone for ignorance. Never! God does not damn people for ignorance. People are condemned for **negative volition**, that is, for an act of the will against God. This passage in Romans 1 shows that God has given everyone clear evidence of Himself. No one has an excuse for not responding to and submitting to the true God. No one can claim ignorance! *“What may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse...”*

We call the evidence for God that we see in creation "natural revelation." We read about natural revelation in Psalm 19:1-4: *“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. ² Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. ³ There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. ⁴ Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.”* This is natural revelation -- God revealing Himself through His creation. Even though everyone has not received the special revelation of Scripture or knowledge of Jesus Christ, **everyone has received natural revelation**. Romans 1 says that there is enough clear evidence of God in creation so that no one has an excuse for not acknowledging the true God and submitting to Him.

Verse 20 indicates that the creation not only gives evidence of the power of God, but also of His divine nature: *“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse...”* How do we see evidence of the divine nature of God in creation? Well, we certainly see evidence of God's nature when we consider the wonderful design in creation -- **intelligent design**. Think of the amazing design of the atom, or the eye, or the amazing design of the DNA molecule. Did you know that your DNA molecule is like an "encyclopedia of you"? Everything about you is contained in your DNA molecule – your eye and hair color, whether you're tall or short, etc. All of this information is in your special DNA molecule.

In fact, this is even more than design -- this is **information** being conveyed! How many of you have ever played the game Scrabble? Now let's say we have a Scrabble board here, and we take all the letters and sort them out. We put all the A's together on the board, and all the B's together on the board, and all the C's, and so forth. We would have order

and design, right? You definitely would **not** look at that Scrabble board and say, "Well, the order of those letters just happened randomly!" But if you spell **words** with those letters, you have **more than design** -- you have **information!** That's the way the DNA molecule is. It's more than just a wonderful design -- it's an encyclopedia of information and instruction! Do you think that all came about by chance? No way! The creation not only reveals the power of God, but the mind and nature and being of God as well.

Here's another example: I think we can appreciate the love of God and care of God from the evidence we see in creation. As we look at the parental instincts that we see in the animal kingdom of God's creation, we see evidence of the Creator's care for His creatures. This could **not** have come about through time and chance and natural processes. No way!

Verse 19 indicates that God has designed people so that they can appreciate and respond to the evidence of God that is clearly seen in creation: *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them."* **No one** can claim ignorance! God does not condemn people for ignorance of the truth.

2. God does condemn people for willful rejection of the truth.

"...although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened." Notice: even though people **knew** God, they **willfully and deliberately rejected** Him and His truth! Verse 22: *"Professing to be wise, they became fools..."* Look back at verse 18: *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness..."* So we see that the truth is not only rejected, it is **suppressed** in unrighteousness! That is, people who willfully reject God suppress or hold back the truth! Do you want to see an example of that? We know today that human life begins at conception. This truth has been confirmed over and over again in no uncertain terms, and yet this truth is suppressed in unrighteousness by those who want to perpetuate the horrible sin of abortion. God will judge people for this sin - and for **all** willful rejection of truth.

God doesn't condemn people for ignorance of the truth, but He does condemn people for willful rejection of the truth.

Practical Application

Don't be brainwashed with the study of "man's religion."

It wasn't too long ago that every major college and university in our country had a theology department where students could study about God -- as God had revealed Himself in nature and Scripture. Now our major colleges and universities have departments of "religion." What's the difference? In departments of religion, you don't study God, you study about man's search for God and man's idea of God. Religious studies today teach that man came up with the idea of God --

that man started with animism and then he moved up to polytheism, and finally arrived and emerged at monotheism.

That is exactly the **opposite** of what the Bible teaches! Look at verse 23: "*and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.*" Man started with the truth, but turned away from God.

So don't be brainwashed by the study of man's religion. When you visit the museums around the world and see the images of gods that ancient people worshipped, don't get the idea that this is the way man started out. No -- that is a departure and degeneration from the original knowledge of the true God. Man's religion has progressed downward, not upward. Don't be brainwashed with the study of "man's religion."