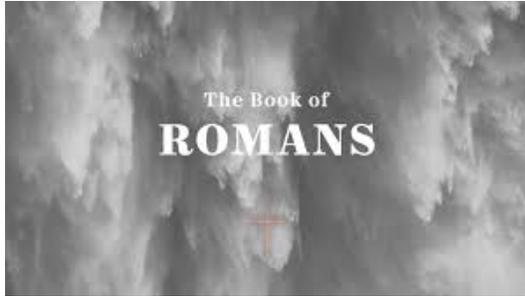


Houston, We Have A Problem
Romans 1:18-32
Romans #3
Weekend of February 15-16, 2020



Introduction

During our introduction to Romans I told you that during the first 100 years of Harvard Law School they had 1st year students analyze Romans as part of their curriculum because of the careful way Paul builds his argument. He starts with common experience and shows how his theory--the gospel--best explains the facts; along the way he raises objections and not only answers them, but shows how they actually strengthen his case.

Today, starting with Romans 1:18, Paul begins to build his case for why the gospel really is the only answer to humanity's problems. Why he's so eager and driven to get it to everybody?

Here's the question Paul is answering: Why can only the gospel fix us? Why can't just a little religion do the trick? I mean, maybe we just need a good talking to? Why doesn't God just renew Israel's commission to deliver God's law to everybody?

And, speaking of God's law, what about people who have never heard God's commands in the Bible? I mean, we can't blame them for failing to obey something they didn't even know about, right?

How is it fair for God to hold people accountable for something they never even had a chance to hear? So why does Paul believe the gospel is the only hope for every person, including those who have never heard of it?

That's where Paul turns in Romans 1:18. He's got to demonstrate that everyone, both religious and irreligious alike, need the gospel. He's gotta get us lost before he can get us saved.

Bible Study

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." Romans 1:18

There are **two dimensions** this passage of scripture makes us explore...

Godlessness means wrong attitudes toward God. A corruption in our vertical relationship.

Unrighteousness is corruption in our horizontal relationships. Instead of being loving, humble, and truthful, We tend to be self-centered, proud, and manipulative.

God's wrath is against people like this, ...who (watch this) by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. Suppression, you know, is not the same as ignorance. Suppression means the truth is in there but you kept yourself from acknowledging it. Like a beach ball you are trying to hold under the water: it keeps trying to come to the surface and you keep pushing it down.

Tim Keller says that WHAT PAUL IS SAYING HERE IS THAT WHEN IT COMES TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, **“we know, but sometimes we don’t know because we don’t want to know.” Does that sound confusing?.**

Near the end of WWII, the first town with a concentration camp that the Allied forces liberated was a town called Ohrdruf, Germany. The Nazis tried to get rid of any evidence of the camp, but the Allied soldiers got there before they could do this. American GI’s witnessed hundreds of dead bodies. It was the first concentration camp that they had witnessed.

A few hours later, **General Patton** arrived and promptly vomited upon witnessing the scene. The next day, Patton brought the mayor of Ohrdruf and his wife to see for themselves what they had to have known what was happening in their town. He ordered the mayor and every able body in the town to dig graves for each body.

After they dug the graves and conducted a funeral for the deceased, Patton found out that the mayor and his wife hung themselves. Before their death, they left a note that read, **“We didn’t know... but we knew.”**

“We know,” says Keller, “but we don't know because we don't want to know.” The truth is too uncomfortable, and would demand too much change. So subconsciously we choose not to know. Look at what Paul says next...

“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.” Romans 1:19-20

There are two places that God reveals himself... **IN US and TO US.**

To Us: Creation, Scripture says, declares to us the reality, power and glory of God. Throughout history, philosophers have broken this down in a number of ways.

One is called the “cosmological argument.” This one goes back all the way to Aristotle. It’s the question of why there is something rather than nothing, and where did the original something come from? **If the world began 14 billion years ago with a Big Bang, where did the materials that caused the Big Bang come from?**

Then there is what philosophers call the “teleological argument” for God. Teleos means purpose: Not only do we have the question of why there is something rather than nothing, but our creation appears to be very finely tuned--for a purpose.

Scientists say that life on earth depends on multiple factors that are so precise that if they were off by even a hair, life could not exist. They call it the Goldilocks principle: things are “just right” for human life. Here is an example...

The water molecule is the only molecule whose solid form (ice) is less dense than its liquid form. Which means that when it freezes it floats. If ice did not float, it would sink to the bottom and the whole ocean would eventually freeze from the bottom up and... we would all die. Here is a second example...

If we were 2% closer to the sun, the planet would be too hot for water to exist. And... SAY IT WITH ME: we'd all die.

Then we put up our telescopes and pull out our microscopes and we find the same complexity in the cell and atomic structure. One scientist said; The greatest miracle of all time without any close second, is the existence of life on our planet! Scientists say that the odds of a planet like earth existing are so heart-stoppingly astronomical that the notion that it all 'just happened' defies common sense. It's like tossing a coin every second and having it come up heads for 10 billion years in a row.

Yeah, you can speculate that this part of the galaxy was just really, really lucky, but is that the best and easiest explanation for what we see?

It takes an anti-God bias to arrive there--it's usually that people have some other problem that follows from a God creating it all that makes them look at the evidence that way. **WE KNOW, BUT WE DON'T KNOW because we don't want to know.**

He has shown it to us, Paul says, and he has revealed it IN US. There are things in our hearts that tell us we are more than just accidental biology—

The atheist philosopher Albert Camus said that we long for "love without parting. Camus called this "the Absurdity of life." He said life was one long, tragic, absurd comedy, as we seek things from life that life simply can't provide.

C.S. Lewis had a different answer. He said..."The Christian says, 'Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.'

Which one do you prefer? That our longings for meaning and justice and eternity are a cruel, accidental, joke; or that they are whispers that we were created for another world? This is called the **argument from desire.**

Another dimension of this is what philosophers call the moral argument: The very fact that we have moral feelings suggest the presence of a divine law giver. This week I parked in parking garage and every few feet was a sign: "Keep your parking ticket with you." Someone, somewhere, was going to ask for it! In the same way, feelings of guilt and moral obligation point to a Divine Lawgiver to whom we will give account. Feelings of guilt and moral obligation are common to all people in all cultures.

Doesn't the fact that we all have feelings of guilt point to the fact that we are stamped with the image of some Divine Lawgiver, who has implanted in our hearts his sense of right, and truth, and love?

What may be known about God is evident to us and in us... but, we suppressed that truth: We KNOW, BUT we didn't know, because we didn't want to know. Look at the next verse...

“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Romans 1:21

We didn't want to embrace the truth about a glorious, all-powerful, holy, ruling God to be true because...

We wanted to make the rules. We wanted to take God's glory for ourselves—we wanted to use our lives to direct others attention toward us, not toward him. So we became plagiarizers. We claimed God's work for ourselves. We didn't want to acknowledge that all our talents, our brains, and every bit of our energy was a gift from God. We're the point. Our comfort is the priority. We know best. Our way is better. Our will is supreme. Look at the next couple of verses...

“Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” Romans 1:22-23

We suppressed our knowledge of God by becoming atheists or agnostics. On one hand, I'm not saying there are not people genuinely convinced that they are atheists. I'm saying that according to Romans 1 that atheism is driven by a subconscious desire not to know. We know but we don't know because we don't want to know.

Which is why a lot of the great atheist-intellec[t]s of the last 100 years who have become Christians—people like T.S. Elliot, W.H. Auden, C.E.M. Joad, C.S. Lewis, A. N. Wilson have all said, “What brought me to faith was not some new argument or evidence. I just admitted to myself that I always knew there was a God.”

The other way our suppression of truth manifested itself was idolatry. Look at verse 23...

“...and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” Romans 1:23

We changed the object of our worship into something we could control. The most basic truth of Creation is that we were created for God and his glory--he is at the center. But we wanted a God who would serve us, be our divine butler, and so we reimagined God in that form. Without God, we just find someone to replace him.

Ernest Becker (Jewish agnostic)... said that after he quit believing in God, he found his soul still searching for acceptance and validation from somebody. He said in his book The Denial of Death, “That modern society, after having ceased to believe in God... turned to the romantic partner as a replacement... “We look to a romantic partner to free us of our sense of nothingness. We want to be justified. We want to know that our existence hasn't been in vain. We want redemption, nothing less...”

We deify the romantic object and worship it. We have to. We can no more turn off our instinct to worship by not being religious than we can turn off our sex drive by remaining single.

The point is, When you say, “ What about those that have never heard? Everybody's heard.

God showed it to us and revealed it in us. But we suppress that knowledge of an all-ruling, all-sovereign God because we didn't want it to be true. (That's the shape of all of our hearts). And for that reason we all stand condemned. Look at the last verses we'll explore today...

“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” Romans 1:24-25

The first wave of God's judgment is to give us what we want. Next week we'll talk about how this manifests in society: How humanity's hearts began to darken, and how our desires began to corrupt, manifesting in things like skewed sexual passions. So, what's do we do with all of this?

Application

Remember in the theme verse of Romans, Romans 1:16–17, Paul says that in the gospel God reveals his righteousness? And what we see in the gospel is that his righteousness is not a standard he judges us by but a gift that God gives to us. The gospel shows you that even though all of us alike have turned away from God and our hearts have grown selfish, wicked, and corrupt, God kept coming after us.

We can know the power of God from CREATION, and the justice of God from our CONSCIENCES, but we can only the love of God from the THE CROSS. Do you want to know who God is? The cross shows you, “Yes, he's holy. Yes, you're unrighteous. But he came after you anyway.”