

## GUILTY

Romans 1:18-28, 32

In his introductory remarks in the letter written to the church at Rome, Paul mentioned credibility credentials criteria in several areas starting with introducing himself. He then moved on to describe the credentials of the gospel and the credentials of Jesus as the promised Messiah. Paul then touched upon the things that validate our situation as believers in the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The church in Rome was a group of believers from different backgrounds – some had Jewish heritage and others had non-Jewish or Gentile backgrounds. All of us have a tendency to emphasize our uniqueness or our differences rather than focusing on what we have in common. As it turns out, our commonality is much broader than our differences and Paul's comments throughout this letter made it clear that while differences exist between Jews and Gentiles that both groups have some very important common situations that take precedence over any differences.

Paul started with a focus on the situation of the unsaved Gentile world (1:18 ff) and their relationship with God before he moved to the Jewish world (2:1 ff) and concluded that both have the same need of salvation that is only available in the good news of Jesus Christ (3:9 ff).

### Revealed in Nature – 1:18-20

<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup> because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. Romans 1:18–20 (NASB95)

To put this group of verses in context, we need to go back to verse seventeen that tells us about the revelation of the righteousness of God and consider that along side of what we see in verse eighteen regarding the revelation of the wrath of God. It is important that we understand both revelations. In verse seventeen Paul was writing about the “righteousness of God that is revealed in the gospel.” This “righteousness” is not a reference to the character (or attributes) of God (which we all realized includes being just) but this is the “righteousness we have” that is imputed to us from God that the gospel declares. The “good news” is that by faith in what God (by His grace) did for us in Christ Jesus we are justified or pronounced to be righteous.

Consider now the “wrath of God” and what Paul is telling us starting in verse eighteen. Most translations render this verse to say the “wrath” is revealed from heaven. However, it is God's “wrath from heaven” (or divine wrath) that is revealed in other ways. Every morally sentient human being has knowledge of God revealed (made evident) to him or her. This evidence revelation is twofold. The first is within each human being (because we are created in the image of God) and the second means is by the physical world creation which shows His invisible attributes, His eternal power, and divine nature.

We, commonly, think of the “wrath of God” as being such things as devastation and destruction of people and things in the physical world in which we live. According to Wuest (Word Studies in the Greek New Testament), “wrath” describes God's personal emotion with regard to sin. It represents God's abhorrence and hatred of sin. It is not punishment of sin but God's attitude toward it.

The physical world (realm) gives evidence of creation. The complexity and orderliness of the creation give proof of intelligent design that spans the breadth from the galaxies to the

microscopic. Intelligent design is proof of a “creator” with timeless existence, unfathomable power and supernatural nature. Any sentient, cognizant adult human being would logically understand the truth of this. Rejection of this truth requires a deliberate decision that ignores the evidence and chooses to embrace an illogical and irrational alternative which is defined as foolishness.

The deliberate act of rejecting and suppressing the clear evidence and substituting an alternative reality typically goes beyond the question of the existence or nonexistence of a divine entity associated with creation. Most (arguably all) who reject the eternal, divine, spiritual realm will also opt for determining for themselves what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. This option is (for all practical purposes) a logical outcome of rejecting or dismissing standards that originate from an eternal, divine, spiritual source. Behaviors that align themselves with such standards have been described or labeled as godly or righteous. Those people who reject the existence of the spiritual realm also reject the revelation of the divine consequences of rejecting the godly and righteous standards. Refusal to believe what has been made evident is inexcusable and no amount of rationalization of sin will change the consequences of sin. The only reasonable option available to human beings is to acknowledge our accountability before God by aligning our attitudes, emotions, and actions with His nature and accept His forgiveness where failure occurred.

#### Replaced by Nonsense – 1:21-23

<sup>21</sup> For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Romans 1:21–23 (NASB95)

When we are confronted with information, we will either ignore it or pay attention to the information. My guess is that much of the information that comes our way is ignored or just filtered out. Some things will grab our attention and when that occurs, then we are faced with what do we do with the information. We can either accept it as truth or reject it as false information. If we reject the data or information that comes to us as false, then we simply move on to whatever else is going on in our lives. If we accept the information as truth, then we are confronted with another decision of whether or not to incorporate this truth into our lives and make necessary adjustments or simply recognize the truth but not respond by a change of attitude or behavior.

The general revelation of God to humanity (in the conscience of individuals and in the physical creation) was generally dismissed by people and was replaced by imagined speculations which amounted to turning away from (dishonoring) God. Since God is Light and there is no darkness in Him, those who turn away from Him are literally in the dark with regard to truth. The failure to give thanks to God was a result of pride in that they gave themselves credit for whatever was accomplished, they thought that they deserved whatever benefits they enjoyed, and they credited the orderliness of creation to random chance rather than to intelligent design or to some other deity (god) they imagined that had the form of man, birds, animals, or serpents.

This action of rejecting revealed truth for speculation is exactly what one would expect when a person has eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Such foolish thinking results eventually and ultimately in death when people continue to choose their own way rather than realize and admit the error and turn from it.

All human beings have the capacity to receive such revelation because they continue to bear the divine image even after the entrance of sin that we read about in the Garden of Eden

account. The ultimate result of natural revelation unaccompanied by any other means of grace is a rejection of God. No one, Paul makes clear here, can ever be saved on the basis of the truth revealed in nature by itself. What is needed in addition to the “general revelation” is the “special revelation” from God that began with Abraham, was unfolded in the interactions of God with Israel and fulfilled in the gospel. Paul concluded, because all people have been given access to genuine knowledge about God, they are, when they turn from it, without excuse. In the next section Paul wrote about the consequences that come upon those who fail to seek God and turn away from him even though they have enough genuine knowledge to realize the goodness of God.

### Delivered Over – 1:24-28

<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. <sup>25</sup> For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. <sup>26</sup> For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, <sup>27</sup> and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. <sup>28</sup> And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, Romans 1:24–28 (NASB95)

These verses give us a general path of those who reject God’s light and embrace darkness that was and is evident among the Gentiles (who do not have the special revelation of God that was available to the Jews). Even in societies that we considered to be civilized, people engaged in practices that were abominations to God. When such practices became unrestrained by considerations of conscience or what is evident in nature as right and proper behavior, then God allowed them to exercise their free will to choose what they did. However, the ability to choose did not include determining the consequences of their behavior. In other words, God would not violate man’s will and force him to do something he did not want to do. An example of such “freedom” of choice was seen in the account of the children of Israel who arrived at the border of the promised land and chose not to trust in (believe) God by refusing to cross over and take the land. Instead, they literally said that it would be better for them to die in the wilderness rather than follow God’s direction. God granted them their choice. That generation literally died in the wilderness over the next thirty-eight years.

There is a general truth that humans become like and become controlled by whatever they choose to worship. The natural (predictable) outcome is immorality of the vilest kind. This regression into the depths of depravity with the attendant consequences can be viewed not only as “permissive” but also as “the judgment of God” in the realm of time. In other words, doing the wrong things produces bad outcomes in the lives of those who embrace depraved behavior that can be seen as retribution for what they are doing. In addition to this “judgment in time” there will also be a “judgment in eternity.”

The “bad outcomes” of depraved behaviors come from “dishonoring” or misusing their bodies and their minds with a result that the outcomes from such behaviors produce more “dishonor” or degradation of their bodies as well as their minds. The degradation and destruction of the body and mind resulting from dishonoring behavior are worse and can even be irreversible when compared to the dishonoring behavior that produced the problems.

Paul was familiar with the outrageous behaviors and perversions of the pagan world and apparently there were known terrible consequences of such acts even two thousand years ago. We can think of situations today in which people have allowed themselves to engage in behaviors that are unnatural which results in devastating diseases such as AIDS. We also know

that STDs had been rampant for hundreds of years and many people suffered and died of such diseases.

It is interesting that the response of those whose behaviors were contrary to normal acceptable behaviors did not choose to abandon the bad behaviors but their responses were to search for man-made remedies to the diseases that resulted from their sin. In other words, fallen mankind's response to the consequences of sin is to treat the symptoms (fruit) rather than correct the cause (root).

### Deserving Death – 1:32

<sup>32</sup> and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. Romans 1:32 (NASB95)

If we were to give people a list of behaviors ranging from really good things to really bad things, and get them to give their opinion of whether the things were positive or negative, I would think that we would see more than 95 percent agreement regarding what was good and what was bad. We could have things such as taking care of and protecting children (ours and other people's) would be an example of a good thing to do. Killing another person or being unfaithful in a marriage or stealing what belonged to someone else would be considered negative behaviors. Paul had presented a list of really negative actions that an overwhelming majority of people (regardless of their backgrounds) would find reprehensible. One of the summary descriptions that he used in verse thirty-one regarding such reprehensible behavior was "without natural affection."

Natural affection would describe behaviors that happen instinctively such as parents protecting their children. Even in the animal world, this is what we see and we would be surprised to find any instance where this did not happen. It is natural to expect that a husband would love his wife and a wife love her husband. We would also expect that children would love their parents and parents love their children. We also expect people to avoid hurting themselves by avoiding known bad behavior such as taking poisons into their bodies. Now, we have started meddling.

Even though practically everyone knows what is the right thing to do, some will go to extremes in becoming engaged in terrible behaviors, some of which might even be described as addictive. As Paul noted in verse thirty-two, they even encourage others to do the same things. Could this be an example of misery loves company or could it be that people are looking for validation of their bad behavior by encouraging and seeing others doing the same thing? Entire societies can get to the point of initially ignoring bad behavior, becoming accepting of bad behavior, encouraging bad behavior, and finally getting to the point to persecuting anyone who would dare point out that such behaviors are wrong, counterproductive, destructive, and even lethal. This seems to be the point to which we have come in our nation at this time.