

Ministry of Grace Church

Romans 1:18-23 - Sermon Notes



Background

Last time we were together, we learned that Paul had a great desire to go to Rome. Not for a sightseeing adventure, but to share with the Romans the most important truth of all time. That is to say, he wanted to share the Gospel message with the church in Rome. But wait! We've already learned that the church in Rome was world-renowned for their faith. So, why did Paul want to share the gospel with people who already knew it?

Previously, we speculated that the people who started the church in Rome may have been among those who were present on the day of Pentecost, when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in all the different languages about Jesus and His resurrection from the dead. And, in describing the various places from which people had gathered in Jerusalem for the the Day of Pentecost, Luke included this in his list,

Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the district of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, (Acts 2:10)

On that day, everyone was hearing the disciples speaking the gospel message in their own language. This was truly amazing given that these were Gallileans who were mostly uneducated fishermen. This got everyone's attention. Then Peter stood up in the middle of the people and preached about Jesus. He said,

Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified. (Acts 2:36)

As a result, on that day there were about three thousand people who believed and were baptized. It is quite possible that it was this group of visitors from Rome who returned home and started the church there. In spite of a minimal amount of teaching for these Christians in Rome, they developed a devout faith that had become well known.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. (Romans 1:8)

As Paul introduced his message in this letter to the Romans, he shared the fact that he was not ashamed of the gospel. This really is pretty amazing given that it had been the cause of Paul's being chased out of Jerusalem by the Jews as well as his being chased out of various other towns by the Jews and Gentiles throughout Asia Minor and Greece. Also, he had been beaten with rods three different times, and was even stoned. All this because he had been preaching this very same gospel message.

And this is why he also wanted to preach it to the people in Rome:

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous will live by faith." (Romans 1:17)

That's why the gospel message is so important to believers? Because through it our faith grows as we walk through this life. And why does God want us to proclaim the gospel message to those around us? Because sinfulness suppresses and hides God's truth. Our job is to reveal that truth to the world around us.

Remember, because of the fall, when Adam and Eve sinned, mankind became trapped by sin. Now, because of man's sinfulness, he does not want to confront God or to be confronted by God. And yet – God does not hide Himself from mankind even though mankind tries to hide from God. In fact, the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. But - His *righteousness* is not the only thing that God reveals about Himself. Paul says:

Romans 1:18-19

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

We see here that God also reveals His wrath to mankind. We Christians are often quick to grasp hold of God's truth and God's love, claiming it as the reason God has revealed his Son to us. But we tend to be just as quick to shun the notion that God gets angry. In fact, the word translated *wrath* in this verse refers to, "anger or wrath that is the outburst of a vengeful mind." We don't like to think of our loving God as vengeful, but He is! Consider the following.

... For it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord. (Romans 12:19)

In fact, there are 43 occurrences of the word "vengeance" in the Bible when talking about our God. Paul does not steer clear of any part of the gospel, even though it may be offensive to man. He says that this wrath of God is revealed against "all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," which is the very opposite of the godliness and righteousness of God Himself.

The word translated "ungodliness" is, *asebia*, which we could translate as "irreverence." Paul is not talking about activities that are non-religious. He is talking about the practices or actions which are "religious" but do not conform to what God wants.

In other words, Paul is talking about people who don't give God the reverence He deserves. These are people who claim to be worshipping God, including those who profess to be Christians. Paul says, they aren't doing the things which God wants them to be doing. Instead, they are suppressing the truth about God by their irreverent and unrighteous ways, and that makes God angry!

Now, before we get too quick to condemn others, let's remember that before we were saved, we were just like them. We didn't give God the reverence He deserved, nor did we act in a way that was right in His eyes. And even now that we have been saved, it's not our own righteousness that God sees (for we are all unrighteous). Remember, the righteousness that God sees in us is the righteousness of Christ, which He has credited to us.

The reason that God's anger is revealed against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men is because they suppress and deny the truth about God. "But" you may ask, "how can anyone suppress and deny the truth about God if they don't know that truth in the first place?" In other words, "How can God hold men accountable before Him if they never really knew Him?" And, "What about the people who have never heard the truth about God?"

Paul anticipates this argument and addresses it directly. Not all things about God are apparent or even knowable by the finite minds of ours. However, there are many things about God that are knowable such as His godliness, His presence, and His power. The reason we know these things, according to Paul, is because God has personally revealed Himself to man. In the next verse, Paul will go on to explain how God has revealed Himself to us.

The point is that our God does not want to be separated from us. He doesn't want to be hidden from us. In fact, He wants to have a personal relationship with us. As we will see in the next verse, He has revealed Himself to all of mankind through creation. However, in spite of that, most people choose to ignore the evidence of creation and refuse to acknowledge Him. Therefore, God sees mankind as unrighteous and irreverent. Nonetheless, He still sent His Son to die on the cross so that we could become righteous and experience close, personal fellowship with Him. And we can experience this personal relationship with Him, not just for a few years, but for all of eternity.

God wants our fellowship! And He wants us to worship Him! Does that seem kind of arrogant? Well let's put ourselves in His sandals for a minute. Imagine that you are God and that you have created this amazing universe, including a self-sustaining planet filled with beauty and wonder. You created it all out of nothing, by your own wondrous power. But, you wanted to share it with someone, so you made some people to inhabit this place. You justly deserve the credit for all that you have done to and for them. But instead of wanting to thank you for it all, they rejected you and the idea that you even exist (ignoring the fact that if you didn't exist, then neither would they.)

Let me ask you, does God not have the right to fellowship with the people He created? Does God not have the right to be recognized as the creator? Does God not have the right to be given praise and glory for all that He has done for His people? He didn't have to do all this, He did it simply because He wanted to. However, in order for these people to give Him the credit for all He has done to and for them, He has to make Himself known to them. That's Paul's next point.

Romans 1:20

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, both His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Paul declares that God reveals a lot about Himself in His created world. He just got through saying, "because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident

to them.” Not all things about God are apparent or even knowable by these finite minds of ours. However, there are things about God which are knowable even though they are not visibly apparent.

“But” you may ask, “what are these invisible things?” Paul answers that question in the latter part of today’s verse, “His eternal power and divine nature.” Mankind understands the fact that God is who He says He is and understands His immeasurable power because these things can be seen in creation. Paul says that they are “clearly seen” and “understood” because of the creation.

Let me say it again, God’s power and Godliness, though invisible, are clearly perceived and understood by His creatures simply by viewing all that He created. We can’t actually see God’s limitless power, but we can see the result of it in creation. We can’t see God’s divinity, but we can see the effect of it in mankind himself. Anyone who has ever seen the birth of a child is confronted with the power and dominion of God and to deny it is to suppress the truth.

Therefore, Paul says, people who suppress the truth about God are without excuse! Much of the world today refuses to believe in the God of creation. Instead, they have gods they call evolution and secular humanism. Some day they will stand before the Creator and He will be undeniable. If you stop and think about it, non-believers have to believe that everything we see came into existence through a “scientific” process that happened all by itself although it can’t be seen, much less proven. I think that takes more faith than to believe that God created it all. They believe that everything that exists came into being out of nothing and it did so all by itself. One way to express that is: “No One times Nothing equals Everything.” Think about that! And yet, they don’t see the absurdity of the “wisdom of this age.” In reality, it is the teaching of fools, which Paul will point out next.

Romans 1:21-23

For even though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the likeness of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

In the previous verse Paul said that the invisible things about God (His eternal power and divinity) are clearly seen and understood by the creatures (mankind). Therefore, they are without excuse. He now goes on to give clarification regarding that statement.

He says, “For even though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or give thanks.” Paul makes it very clear that all of mankind has known God, but some will not give Him the glory and the worship that He is due. Neither will they give Him the thanks that He justly deserves. Paul made it clear that those who reject God recognize His power and divinity but willingly reject Him.

The next phrase is very interesting. It says, “but they became futile in their thoughts.” The words “became futile” are translated from the Greek word *mataioō*, which means “to become destitute of real wisdom” or “to become foolish.” The word is expressed in the passive voice, indicating that it is something that was done to them. That is, some one made them destitute of real wisdom when they rejected God. The implication is that God made fools of them because they rejected

the real truth. Their very ability to reason with regard to God has been made to be without wisdom. Paul also says, “[their foolish heart was darkened.](#)”

Those who reject God do not have the spiritual light; instead, they live in darkness. Consider this, the real pain of Hell for those who reject God will not be that of the heat and flame, it will be the darkness created by the total absence of God and the knowledge that He is gone from them for eternity!

Paul’s message is quite clear in this verse. Those who reject God do so of their own will after having comprehended the existence and power of God. As a result of that rejection, God has made them unable to understand Him, and He has removed His light from their hearts. In a very real sense, God has already judged them because they have rejected who He really is and what He has done.

Also - the words “[they became fools](#)” are a translation of a single Greek word *morainō*, which means “to become a moron or a simpleton.” This, again, is in the passive voice indicating that it is something that was done **to** them. We could paraphrase this verse, therefore, as:

[Claiming to be wise people, they were made to be fools.](#)

Not only did God make their reasoning and discussions void of any real wisdom, He then turned them into fools while at the same time they are proclaiming how wise and intelligent they are. How else could someone actually believe that **No One times Nothing equals Everything?**

If you listen to the message of the intellectuals and scientists of today you will hear loud proclamations that there is no God. They will tell you with certainty that we have evolved into the species we are today. But Scripture makes it very clear that God is in control and is not mocked by those who deny His existence and power. In this verse, Paul tells us that instead of being mocked by them, God makes them to be the fools they think we Christians are. A just sentence for someone who claims to be smart and at the same time rejects Almighty God, don’t you think?

So What?

Paul has been talking about those people who suppress the truth about God. They deny His power and His very existence, even though God has made Himself known to them through his creation. And because they refused to thank Him or to glorify Him, He gives them up to foolish reasoning, while they think themselves to be wise.

Let me give you just one example. Science has determined the exact speed at which the universe is expanding. And yet – they have also determined that this speed must be exactly the right speed in order for it to continue to exist. For instance, if the universe expanded more quickly by only one itty, bitty, teeny, tiny fraction (1 part in 10^{55}), then matter would expand too quickly for the formation of stars, planets, and galaxies. Now, just to give you a point of comparison, 10^{12} would be one part in a trillion. So, one part in 10^{55} would be less than one trillionth, of a trillionth, of a trillionth, of a trillionth. That’s pretty small. Science has also determined that if the universe expanded only slightly more slowly (again, by 1 part in 10^{55}), the universe would have collapsed before the stars could be formed. That’s how precise the expansion of the universe has to be. Did that happen by chance?

Instead of mankind worshipping the true God, Paul says that these ungodly people choose to worship the creatures instead of the creator. The Old and New Testaments are filled with

examples of animals and their images that have been worshipped throughout the ages. The Greek gods were nearly always in the form of humans with supernatural abilities. The Egyptian Gods, on the other hand, were in the form of birds, animals, and reptiles. Rome had adopted all of these as acceptable deities to worship. Secular history records the numerous creatures that have been the focus of man's religion, and it continues on to the present day.

Today, the most prevalent form of idol worship is secular humanism. Though believers in this religion would claim to not worship any god, it is themselves that they make to be the gods. In order to do this, they claim that there is no God, so instead, the Creator God turns them into fools believing in such things as "the big bang" and "evolution," all the while promoting the supremacy of mankind. Remember, they believe that **"No One times Nothing equals Everything."**

Here are some other tenants of their belief system and God's response to their idiocy:

Secular Humanism:	All of human existence is random.
God:	God is sovereign, nothing is random.
Secular Humanism:	There is no absolute truth. Truth is relative.
God:	God's Word is absolute truth.
Secular Humanism:	Man is basically good.
God:	Man is inherently evil.
Secular Humanism:	The goal of life is self satisfaction.
God:	The goal in life is selfless submission to Christ.

Paul pointed out to us that God has already revealed Himself to all of mankind and, as a result, all of mankind is without excuse. We, who have believed the truth about Jesus Christ, have been credited with a righteousness that we didn't earn and that we don't deserve. These facts alone should cause all Christians to fall to their knees praising God for His mercy, His grace, and His Word!

So - the next time you gaze at a sunset, a mountain, a river, a beautiful flower, the crashing waves at the beach, the starry sky on a clear night, or the miracle of a new-born child, be in awe. This is evidence of God, Himself! And, this God of creation wants to have a close personal relationship with you. Yes, even you!

Throughout the Old Testament we are told that God is a jealous God, and we are not to worship anyone or anything other than Him. Yes, He is a loving God, but He is also a jealous God who expects us to recognize Him for who and what He is. Those who neglect to do so are destined for a torturous and dark eternity!

God is not mocked! Just because the world claims there is no God does not make it so, and Paul will continue in the next section of this letter to describe what God's response to their "great wisdom" has been - and will continue to be. But that's a discussion for next time.

Let's pray.