

A WORLD THAT SUPPRESSES TRUTH

Romans 1:18-3:20
Key Verse: 1:18

Lesson 2

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness."

In 1:17 Paul declared that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel; therefore, the righteous will live by faith. But 1:18-3:20 reveals that the wrath of God is being revealed against those who suppress the truth, both Jew and Gentile. This contrast shows us man's absolute need for the gospel. Paul's purpose in 1:18-3:20 is to show that sin is universal problem--all men are infected by it, and therefore, the gospel--God's universal, one and only solution to the sin problem--is needed by all people. At the root of the sin problem is men's suppression of truth by their wickedness.

1. The truth suppressed

The basic truth that undergirds all truth is that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, and he alone is the sovereign Lord of all things. Verse 19, 20 says that what may be known about God is plain to all men, because God has made it plain. 'Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and invisible nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse., God the Creator is the Sovereign Ruler and owner of all things. He should be honored and worshiped and obeyed. Verse 25 says that men deliberately 'exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen. So the suppression of truth is deliberate and sin is deliberate, so men are without excuse. Every person is fully responsible for his sins. It is the tendency of a society that has been influenced by psychology to help people solve their guilt problem by putting the responsibility for sin somewhere else. One's parents or the social structures or one's community or other people are somehow responsible. This removes guilt feelings and gives temporary relief, but it does not solve the problem of sin. Only God can solve the problem of sin, and he has chosen to do so through the gospel alone. So sin must be repented of before God and his gospel of forgiveness must be accepted and believed.

These chapters show how men deliberately suppress the truth by their wickedness. Verse 21 says, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him...." Pride and ingratitude lie at the root of the wickedness that suppresses truth.

Verse 18 says that the wrath of God is being revealed against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth... How does God reveal his wrath?

2. The wrath of God

The greatest human problem is not poverty or even hunger or war. It is sin. Because all men have sinned, all humanity and all creation became the object of God's wrath.

God reveals his wrath in two ways against all the godlessness and wickedness of men. First, in verses 19-32, God reveals his wrath by removing his hand of restraint and protection from the godless world. Second, (2:1-3:20) on the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed, every person must stand before him, give an account and be sentenced. On that day, everyone will be measured by the righteous standard of Jesus (2:16).

a. God's wrath revealed against the pagan world

When men do not honor God as God or thank him, they turn to idolatry, for man was created with a God-sized empty place in his heart. If the rightful Creator and Owner of mankind, the One worthy of his worship, does not occupy that place, then something or someone else will. Men who think they are so wise and smart that they can get along without God are fools. Without God in their hearts, their hearts become dark and their thinking becomes futile. How foolish it is for man to worship an image made of gold or stone; or to worship a cow and starve to death; or to worship money, fame, power, other men or women-- things which perish. But the problem is not just one of being foolish. When men abandon God, he takes his hands off their lives. He gives them the absolute freedom from God which they desire. And what happens? Verse 24 says, "God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity..." Man's godless heart lead to a corrupt life. He who so longs for freedom becomes a slave of his own or another's lust.

When God is not honored as God, creation order is turned upside down. Men first exchange the glory of God for images (23); then, they exchange the truth of God for a lie; (25) then, they exchange natural relations for unnatural ones. Homosexuality is not natural. It is a perversion.

"men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion." When God removes his hands of love and restraint from mankind, first the individual loses his freedom, then the family is destroyed, finally the whole society becomes like hell. (26-31) Society without God becomes senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Then those who know that this wickedness deserves death not only continue to practice evil, they try to teach others that such evil acts are right. They deliberately remove the moral guidelines from society, leaving the young people in a sea of sin and chaos and death. (32) God is not indifferent. He is a God who cares. He reveals his wrath in this passive way in order to allow men to experience hell and repent.

b. God's righteous judgment on moral and religious sinners (2:1-3:8)

Some who read the list of sins in 1:18-32 may say, 'I'm glad I'm better than those people. How terrible they are! In Paul's time, the Stoics and the Pharisees thought like this. The followers of Confucius also think this way. And some of us who call ourselves Christians also try to exclude ourselves from the sins of Romans 1. But Paul says to us, "You have no excuse for passing judgment on another, for you do the same things you condemn in others." My first reaction is to deny this. But I must listen to what God says. First, God is the righteous judge. He alone is qualified to judge a person, for his judgment is based on truth. He knows everything about all people. He is kind and patient and tolerant because he is waiting on them and on me to repent. If I only look at others with judgmental eyes, and self-righteously compare myself with them, I will miss the opportunity God is giving me to search my own heart and life and repent. He warns us, "By your stubborn and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath... "

God's judgment is righteous and impartial. He does not show favoritism. He judges each person, not according to what he knows but according to what he has done. He does not look at the outer actions of men, but at their inner motives. He looks at what men seek. Men are created for the glory of God. our chief end must be to glorify God. Those who by persistence in doing good seek God and his glory with every part of their beings will receive eternal life; those who are self-seeking, who seek their own glory and benefit, who reject the truth and follow evil will receive trouble and distress, wrath and anger. God will judge the Jews according to the law which they know so well. His test will not be a written test on how much they know; it will be a practical test on what they do. He will judge the Gentiles according to their consciences. They will also have a practical exam. The measuring stick for all men is Jesus Christ. God does not lower his standard. God's cut line is so high that no one can pass. The Jews do not live up to the perfect requirements of the law; the Gentiles cannot live up even to the standards their own consciences set for them.

We who have the Bible--Jew and Christian are judged most severely. (2:17-3:8) If we teach others what is right, and rejoice in our special privilege of being God's people, then dishonor God by breaking his laws ourselves, then God's name--which should be proclaimed to the ends of the earth--is blasphemed among the people and nations of the unbelieving world. (2:24) our hearts must be circumcised by repentance until the love of God fills us.

Conclusion: Paul's conclusion is simple: No one is righteous. He draws quotations from the Bible to show that no one is righteous, not even one person, for no one seeks God. He shows how all people are under the power of sin, and have become worthless. Men's mouths cannot glorify God; they only spew out the poison that is in their hearts. Their feet can only follow the way that leads to destruction. So, when they stand before

God's judgment throne, they can't say anything. What we know only makes us conscious of our helpless sinfulness. unless God provides another way, there is no hope for anyone. But, praise God, he provided another way. That is what the gospel, the good news of Jesus is all about.