

TUTORIAL
3.3

Finding Ourselves Condemned

We see that all mankind is under God's wrath, both Jews and Gentiles. We have all rejected God's Truth, which is evident in creation. This module was developed from lessons presented by Bible Teacher Scot Keen.

Introduction

In the previous tutorials we discussed Paul's thesis, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16-17). Paul unifies the church in Rome by showing that both Jews and Gentiles are in need of a Savior and that the Gospel is the answer to the needs of both.

Righteousness needed

So far Paul has introduced the letter of Romans and given his thesis statement. Now he goes into a large section on righteousness and condemnation. Paul says, "We have already charged (or given allegations, given proof) that both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin."

This is significant because when Paul gets to chapter three he says, *we have been proving this*. That means that everything Paul says up until this point is his proof. So we need to read Romans 1:18- 3:20 as Paul's evidence that all of humanity is under sin and needs a Savior.

Paul will break it down for us. He will look first at God's wrath towards Gentiles and then show us the impartiality of God's wrath towards Jews and Gentiles. He will then specifically focus on the Jew and God's wrath and afterwards will conclude with a section has implications for all humanity. We will follow this sequence in the following tutorials.

Revelation of God's wrath towards Gentiles

Look at Romans 1:18-32. We see the revelation of God's wrath towards the Gentiles. We are talking about those who have no written witness of God's Word. It is important to catch that upfront. In Romans chapter one Paul says, "People have rejected the knowledge of God through creation." He goes on to

say in verse twenty, “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.”

We are telling you this upfront so that you see that the Gentiles are condemned *even though* they do not have God’s Word. All they have is God’s testimony through creation. The destiny of the heathen (those who have never heard the Gospel) is a big theological topic. Paul is talking about these people and he shows us that they too are condemned and without excuse.

We challenge you in this tutorial to let God’s word speak more loudly than your cultural beliefs. This will challenge your worldview about those who have never heard the Gospel.

Wrath revealed

Let’s zero in on verse eighteen in Romans chapter one. Paul says, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” God’s wrath is revealed and what it reveals is ungodliness. This does not necessarily refer to someone who is living in dramatic wickedness. It refers to anyone who does not care that God’s wrath is against them, even though it has been revealed to them. Paul is talking specifically about people who suppress the Truth in unrighteousness.

We see that God’s Truth, through creation, reaches the conscience of mankind, and mankind in turn suppresses it for the sake of unrighteousness. To give you a personal example, growing up there were times I wanted to enjoy my sin, but the presence of God’s Word interfered with my enjoyment of it. So I would ignore God’s Truth in order to enjoy unrighteousness.

Well, that is the idea here. Mankind holds back, or suppresses, the Truth for the sake of unrighteousness. And wrath is revealed from heaven against all the unrighteousness and ungodliness of mankind.

Truth revealed

But not only wrath is revealed, but also truth is revealed. Look at verse nineteen in Romans chapter one. Paul says, “Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.” When he says *evident within them*, he is referring to the fact that God made human beings in His image with a capacity to perceive the revelation of God, whether through creation or through His written Word.

But how did God make His Truth evident to the nations? They do not have God’s Word, so how did God make it evident to them? Verse twenty tells us.

Paul says, "Since the creation of the world his invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen."

Listen to this language. Invisible and yet clearly seen. God's invisible attributes are clearly seen and they have been seen since creation. The idea is that since God said, "Let there be light," there has been an ongoing testimony to God's existence in creation. Creation demands the existence of a Creator.

Let me give you a personal example. Years ago I took my family to a zoo in Fort Wayne, Indiana. As we walked into the zoo, my five-year-old son suddenly stopped in his tracks when he spotted some vines in the shape of a horse. He stood there for the longest time and finally said, "They had to do that." He realized that this was not the way that vines and tall grasses naturally grow. He knew that Someone with intelligence had created it. It was not just an accident.

If that is true of vines and grasses fashioned in the shape of a horse, how much truer is it in the case of all of God's creation! Since the creation of the world, God's invisible attributes have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made. So Paul says, "They are without excuse." Since the time God spoke the world into existence, there has been testimony of His existence. Psalm nineteen confirms this by saying, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork and day after day reveal speech and knowledge." Creation is God's silent, ongoing testimony to His existence.

Here is another personal example. When I was growing up in South-East Kentucky, my friends and I frequently explored the mountains. On one occasion, we found a rock which we decided to camp under. We soon discovered pieces of flint in the rock. It occurred to us that there must have been life there before us. Perhaps Indians had camped under that rock many decades or centuries before. It is the same with God's creation. You see evidence of His presence everywhere and, for that reason, Paul says, "They are without an excuse."

So far we have seen wrath revealed from heaven, truth revealed in God's creation, and now we see that God's Truth has been rejected. Look closely at verse twenty. Paul says, "Because God's testimony is clear and constant, man is without an excuse." When Paul says *without an excuse*, he uses the Greek word *anapologetos*. This is the same word that is used in 1 Peter referring to the fact that we should always be ready to give an answer for our faith. In other words, we should be ready to give an apology.

Truth rejected

Being ready to give an apology means being ready to give a reason or a defense. Because of God's creation and the testimony to His existence, men are *anapologetos*. They are without a reason or defense. There is nothing that

they can say in their defense because God's creation testifies to the fact that God exists. They had truth but they rejected that truth and, for that reason, they stand condemned. Look at verse twenty-one. "Even though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks."

Paul is speaking historically of a time when the nations had a knowledge of God. Most likely this refers to the time when Noah's three sons came off the ark, and the nations that follow them, leading up to the time of Babel. They exchanged the knowledge of God for a lie.

Paul says, "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. Professing to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image." And again, he says, "They exchanged the truth." To exchange the Truth means that at one point in their history they must have been in possession of the Truth.

Given over to impurity

No one returns an item to a store and opens up an empty bag and says they want to exchange it. You cannot exchange something if you do not have something to begin with. They exchanged both the Truth of God and the glory of God. And so, we have seen that Truth was revealed and then rejected. Because of that, God gave mankind over to impurity.

Look at verse twenty-four. Paul says, "Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever." As a result of rejecting the God's knowledge, God gave man over to his darkened heart.

Given over to degradation

Mankind came to a place of believing a lie over truth, and so became undiscerning. In verse twenty-six Paul says, "For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another."

Now we have homosexuality coming out of this rejection of God's knowledge, pulling mankind into a moral, downward spiral. Paul begins to talk about *what they did* and *what God did*. In terms of what they did, Paul says, "They exchanged the glory of God. They exchanged the truth of God, they did not see fit to retain God in their knowledge." God is responding to the nation's rejection of His Truth by giving them over to the lusts of their hearts. He gave them over to degrading passions and a depraved mind.

Note that God did not make them have a depraved mind. God turned them over to go the direction that their hearts had already chosen. If you have ever stood on a riverbank holding onto a boat with a rope, all you have to do is just let go of the rope and the current will carry the boat away. That in essence is what God did. He allowed mankind to go their own way, the way of their wicked hearts. In doing so God gave them over to the impurities that were already in their hearts.

Given over to a depraved mind

So far we have seen truth revealed, truth rejected, and mankind given over to impurity, degradation and a depraved mind which is incapable of discernment. Look at what Paul says in verse twenty-eight. He says, “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind.” They have a mind that can actually believe something that makes no sense whatsoever.

You see this happening throughout history. Let’s look at some examples of this happening. There is a tribal group in Papua New Guinea that had a practice of mummifying elders. The tribal people there came to the conclusion that their elders could work magic on them and could bring either sickness or blessing. After the elders die, the people mummify them and bring them sacrifices daily. They bring food on a plate and leave it there for the elders. Now you could ask them, “If they're eating the food, how come the food is still there?” They would say, “The spirit of the ancestor takes the spirit of the food.” It is obvious to us that have become futile in their speculations, given over to a reprobated mind. We look at this in disbelief from the standpoint of our civilized culture and wonder how could anyone believe a lie such as that.

An example from Western culture

But flip it around and look at western culture. Charles Darwin came up with the Theory of Evolution and made arguments claiming that advanced lifeforms came from primitive lifeforms. People from third-world and majority-world countries look at the western world and wonder how anyone could be foolish enough to believe that. You get in essence is what Paul is saying in Romans one *professing to be wise, they became fools*.

Think of it this way. If mankind rejects truth then the only alternative is to walk in lies. That is exactly what has happened throughout the world. Notice verse thirty-two. Paul says, “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.”

And the reason we are calling attention to this verse is because, so far, Paul has been using past tense. They *knew* God, they *did* not honor God, God *gave*

them over. It is all in past tense. But now Paul uses present tense. “Although they *know* (present tense) that those who *do* such things are worthy of death.” Paul is highlighting that the state the Gentile world was in was the result of rejecting the knowledge of God. And because truth has been revealed mankind is now without excuse.

Think of Richard Dawkins, an avowed atheist and an opponent of Christianity. When debating John Lennox he said, “When we go into a garden, and we see how beautiful it is and we see colored flowers, of course it is natural to think that there must be a gardener. Any fool is likely to think there must be a gardener. The huge achievement of Darwin was to show that that didn't have to be true.” Listen to what he says here, “Of course it's difficult, of course it would have to wait until the mid-nineteenth century before anybody thought of it.” He is in fact saying, “It seems so obvious that if you have a garden then there must be a gardener who created it. What Darwin did was show us the staggering, counter-intuitive fact that this can be explained by an undirected process.”

What we are calling attention to in Dawkin's quote is that he *himself* admits that it is only natural to conclude that when there is a garden, there must be a gardener. He is saying that it is counter-intuitive to think otherwise. How did mankind get to the place it is in? It is because we rejected the knowledge of God. When you reject the knowledge of God the only alternative is to walk in lies.

However the book of Romans does not leave us there. We will soon see that God has provided salvation for all mankind, including those who are in the remotest parts of the earth living in the darkest depravity. Were it not for God, who has sent out the Gospel of His Son (as we saw earlier in chapter one), those nations would still be there, perishing without any hope whatsoever.



DISCUSSION POINTS

Finding Ourselves Condemned

1. God's wrath is revealed from heaven against those who are doing what?
2. In order to suppress the truth, what do people have to possess in the first place?
3. How is this truth revealed? Through what means?
4. What is being revealed about God through this means?

5. From your text, what phrases describe how well God has revealed Himself through creation?
6. According to the text, what did these people do with what they knew about God?
7. These people suppressed the truth, etc. What did God do in response to their sin?
8. How is God's wrath manifested in Romans 1?
9. How do we know from this passage that Paul is talking about those who do not have special revelation?



ACTIVITIES

Finding Ourselves Condemned

What are some possible objections one might hear when teaching about the lost state of those who have never heard? Write down any examples of interaction you have had with other believers and what their response has been.