

NEW DAY... NEW WAY

The Question Christians Dread

TEXT: Romans 1

INTRODUCTION:

I love to preach sermons people like. I dearly love to preach about

- The majesty and power of God
- The miracles of God
- The love of Christ
- The providence of God

And certainly there are an abundance of texts that declare these truths and give opportunity for such messages.

But when you are committed to preaching and or teaching the whole counsel of God, you do come to texts like the one in the first chapter of Romans that we read this week.

Rom. 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

The wrath of God is an unpopular subject today among Christian authors and preachers. But Paul had no such aversion.

Before declaring the means and benefits of salvation, Paul clearly demonstrated from what men need to be saved and why.

“All have sinned” and “the wages of sin is death” precedes “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom. 3:23, 6:23).

The bad news that we are sinners justly condemned comes before the good news that God in love, grace, and mercy offers to save us from our sin.

The whole of Scripture declares the reality of the wrath of God.

- God pronounced a death sentence on Adam and Eve and cursed the world in which they lived as a result of their sin.
- God destroyed all mankind except Noah and his family because “every intent of their heart was only evil continually.”
- God confused the language of sinful men building the Tower of Babel and scattered them across the face of the earth.
- He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, Pharaoh and his armies, and even sent His own children into exile because of their sin.

Neither is the wrath of God confined to the Old Testament. **The New Testament does not mask the severity of God's wrath nor mute its proclamation.**

- Jesus warned of fiery hell (Mt. 5:22)
- and told people it was better to have a limb cut off than be cast into hell. (Mt. 5:28-29)
- He also told of the rich man who went to hell. (Lk. 16:19-31)

Jesus clearly juxtaposed salvation with condemnation.

John 3:16-18 ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. ¹⁸ "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 3:36 He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

God is perfect in His every attribute.

- A part of His character, revealed by His Word is that **He perfectly loves righteousness.**
- An equal part of His character, also revealed in His Word is that **He perfectly hates evil.**

Therefore

Rom. 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

This statement and many others like it in the Scriptures often prompt people to ask the question I call the Question Christians Dread.

There are two reasons many Christians dread this question.

- 1. They are still asking the question themselves.**
- 2. They do not know the answer.**

So, what is the question Christians dread?

How can a just, righteous, loving, merciful God pour out His wrath on people who have had no opportunity to know the truth about Him?

The question is phrased a lot of ways, but the root of the inquiry is always the same.

How can God condemn people to hell for not trusting in Jesus when they have never heard the gospel or even the name of the Savior?

Rom 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

In the final clause of this sentence and the explanation of it that follows, God gives a clear and convincing answer.

- people are ungodly and unrighteous,
- they also suppress the truth in unrighteousness.
 - These words can be rendered “constantly are suppressing the truth by persisting in their sin.”
 - The problem is not that men and women know nothing of God and truth.
 - The problem is that they hide the truth from themselves and others because they love sin.

The Lord Jesus offered the same explanation.

John 3:19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

And now Paul (and the Spirit) prove that this is the case here in the latter half of Romans, Chapter 1.

I. ALL PEOPLE EVERYWHERE HAVE SUFFICIENT OPPORTUNITY TO KNOW GOD AND THE TRUTH.

Rom. 1:19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them.

God has shown *it* (the knowledge of God) to them.

What may be known of God is manifest in them means literally “clearly known” in them. In other words, this knowledge of God is both clearly revealed and inside of them, because God has shown *it* to them.

How has God done this?

Rom. 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

For since the creation of the world

The awe inducing nature of the created order has been present for every person to observe since the creation of the world.

Even the men and women who lived long before our modern scientific age could look into the expanse of the night sky and have their breath drawn away in fascination and wonder. Those who observed more carefully noted patterns in the movement of the stars; heavenly bodies shifting in orderly progression.

On the earth, the same order, beauty, and intricacy was also seen, literally everywhere. The pear tree bloomed and produced its fruit. Inside the fruit were seeds. Inside the seeds was a white mass, mixed with browns. But if the seed were left intact, when dropped into the ground and watered, it grew into a replica of the tree that bore it! Even before some of **the workings of the universe** began to be understood, the observation of these wonders **produced a common question: “Who made these things?”**

The clear evidence of design caused them to ask, internally if not externally, **“Who is the Designer?”**

Modern technology and scientific understanding has not reduced the mystery but increased it. We understand something of how a tree replicates itself by plant DNA stored in the cells of a seed that then instructs those cells to reproduce and manufacture all of the other types of cells needed to make the tree, and to do it in a logical progression that allows it to move from seeding to a mature tree. But our understanding does not diminish our fascination, nor does it answer the question. **Now we ask, “Who put all the information coded into DNA into the chemical composition of the molecule?”** Our common sense understanding that **the source of that information must be greater than the information encoded** means that it must be far beyond human ability, **for we cannot even fully understand the code, much less create one on our own.**

His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead,
So, here is the point. Paul says...

The invisible attributes of God, especially His eternal power and deity, **are clearly seen by means of the things that God has made.** The revelation of His own divine nature and majesty is not only for the astute, but for everyone. The revelation is clearly seen. This is what David was speaking of when he wrote,

Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.

II. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A PERSON IS RESPONSIVE TO THIS REVELATION?

What happens when they see the testimony of God’s power and divinity and conclude, “There must be a God who created these things.”

Is that sufficient to save them? The answer is **“No!”**

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

When people respond properly to God's self revelation through creation, God does not promise them salvation.

He promises them more revelation.

Jeremiah 29:13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

The promise of the Almighty to every person is that if they will seek Him with their whole heart, He will see to it that they find Him. The Lord spoke through Ezekiel in **Ezekiel 33:11** Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live... Peter testified in **2 Peter 3:9** The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

God does not cause people to be born in places where there is no knowledge of Himself and no gospel so that He can then throw them into hell.

In the most obscure place, God provides a witness through the things He made in the creation that say to each man and each woman, "There is a God, and He is all powerful." **If they then seek God with all their heart, God sends them more revelation, ultimately the gospel.** If they continue to seek, they will come to faith in Jesus Christ and be saved.

We see that exact scenario with the Ethiopian eunuch.

- **He was seeking God.**
- Somehow, **God had allowed him to have** a copy of the **scroll of Isaiah**, which shows the lengths God was going to in order to save this man who was seeking Him.
- The eunuch came to the place where **he became ready for the gospel.**
- **God sent an angel to Phillip** and
- **sent Phillip to the desert** where the Ethiopian was reading Isaiah in his chariot. Then
- **the Holy Spirit directed Phillip to the Ethiopian.** Meanwhile,
- **the Spirit has directed the Ethiopian's attention to Isaiah 53**, which speaks of the Suffering Servant Messiah.
- **His question about the passage opens the door to the sharing of the gospel**, and the
- **Ethiopian believes and is baptized.**

Cornelius was a centurion in the Roman army. The Bible describes him as

- **Devout and as one who prayed often.**
- **He was a God-seeker**, and
- **God sent Peter to him to explain the gospel**, and
- **Cornelius was saved.**

Lydia of Thyatira was a

- **God-seeking woman.**
- **The Lord sent Paul to share the gospel, and**
- **She was saved.**

Paul used this very approach with the lost men of Athens who had no knowledge of the One True God at all. Acts 17:23-28 for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: ²⁴ God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. ²⁵ Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. ²⁶ And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, ²⁷ so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸ for in Him we live and move and have our being...'

Paul

- **Begins by declaring God as the creator** of the universe and the creator of all life.
- He then **says that God created man to seek the Lord** and offers the hope that they will find Him and
- **Points out that He is not far off.**

Let us return to the question that was asked.

III. THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION CHRISTIANS DREAD

How can a just, righteous, loving, merciful God pour out His wrath on people who have had no opportunity to know the truth about Him?

There is no such thing as a person who had no opportunity to know the truth about God.

- **Every person has the revelation through creation of the divinity and power of the One True Creator God.**
- **If that person rightly responds to that revelation he or she is given, God will get the gospel to them.**
- **Therefore those who go to hell are only those who either refuse the witness of God given by creation or who refuse to trust the Christ of the gospel.**

How can God condemn people to hell for not trusting in Jesus when they have never heard the gospel or even the name of the Savior?

- **Because if a person will seek the God of Creation with all their heart,**
- **God will give them more revelation, ultimately the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

- **Those who go to hell have rejected the witness of creation or the witness of the gospel or both.**

so that they are without excuse,

Therefore, the Holy Spirit says to the Romans and to us, they are without excuse. No one will ever be able to rightly accuse God of injustice or unfairness. He will never be guilty of capriciousness. It has been said, and rightly so, that the only ones who go to hell are those who choose to go there. **God has lovingly and longingly revealed Himself as the Almighty Creator to everyone He created.**

Those who respond by seeking Him with all their heart, will find Him in the person of Jesus Christ who died on the cross to give them forgiveness of sin and eternal life.