

# Sermon Notes

Romans 1:18-23

"Everyone Knows God"

A Sermon Series on the Book of Romans

October 23, 2016

## Introduction

1) Have you ever asked (or overheard) why an unbeliever doesn't believe? For example . . .

- a) *"There is no evidence, or a lack of evidence, for a belief in god."*
- b) *"I'm spiritual, not religious."*

(Yes, these people too are unbelievers since they reject the commandments of Christ and His church.)

Matt 18:17-20; 28:17-20; John 20:21-23;  
1Cor 11:25; 1Thes 5:12-13; 1Tim 5:17;  
Heb 10:23-25; 13:17; 1Pet 5:2-3

- c) *"I believe all religions contain the truth."*
- d) *"You don't have to go to church, and/or be a Christian, to be a good person."*
- e) *"I just can't believe in all that stuff in the Bible."*
- f) *"The Bible is full of contradictions and mistakes."*
- g) *"You're god is an evil god."*

2) How do you respond?

3) More importantly, though a seldom asked question, do you believe them?

(Do you think they are telling you, and themselves, the truth with their reply?)

- a) This is a very important question.
- b) It affects how you do apologetics (defending the faith).
- c) And it affects one's own mental sanctification (making your thinking more biblical and Christ like).

1Pet 3:15

Rom 12:2;  
Eph 4:21-24

4) The Bible, and in particular today's sermon text (Rom 1:18-23), deals with this.

- a) It teaches that everyone knows God exists.
  - i) **Rom 1:19** – *"that which is known about God is evident . . . for God made it evident to them"*
  - ii) **Rom 1:20** – God has *"been clearly seen"*
  - iii) **Rom 1:21** – For *"they knew God"*
- b) The problem isn't lack of evidence, but delusion.
  - i) **Rom 1:18** – They *"suppress the truth in unrighteousness"*
  - ii) **Rom 1:20** – They have all the evidence they need, therefore *"they are without excuse."*

5) However, we have been so trained by the world to think in a secular, individualistic, autonomous, manner.

- a) We take the unbeliever at their word and assume that man is an independent, morally neutral agent that can sit in judgment of God!
- b) Romans 1:18-23 corrects us of this erroneous thinking that leads to idolatry.

## **Romans 1:18-23**

- 1) Last week we began to look at Paul's detailed description of the Gospel in **Rom 1:18-8:39**.
  - a) The first major theme covered in Romans 1:18-3:20 is the sinfulness of man.
  - b) If you get the doctrine of sin wrong, then you will get everything else wrong.
  - c) The whole reason for the Gospel is that fallen man stands condemned by a holy God.
  - d) Our only hope is not in ourselves, but Christ's perfect righteousness credited (or imputed) to us by the grace of God and received by faith alone.
- 2) The totality of sin, and its damage done to fallen man, has wide effecting implications.<sup>1</sup>
  - a) Sin affects our body, causing weakness, disease, aging, etc.
  - b) Sin also affects our mind and soul, corrupting our thinking and making us foolish. (Foolishness is a combination of stupidity and immorality.)
- 3) Paul begins his discussion of the effects of sin, first and foremost, on your thinking.
  - a) For the ancients, and the Bible, the mind controls the entire person.
  - b) It is what separates us from the beasts and brutes. Dan 4:16; Rom 1:28-32
  - c) Christians are commanded to renew their mind, having them not be conformed to the world, but conforming our thinking to Christ. Rom 12:2; Eph 4:20-23
- 4) Again, the problem for sinful man is delusion, that fallen man by his nature *"suppress the truth in unrighteousness."* – **Rom 1:18**
  - a) Fallen man suppresses the innate knowledge of God we all have.
  - b) And prefers to love his sin and hate God, instead of honoring Him.
- 5) We already have enough evidence that God exists.
  - a) *"because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them."* – **Rom 1:19**
    - i) This isn't talking about saving knowledge.
    - ii) In that sense, many people do not know God. Job 18:21; 1Cor 1:21; Gal 4:8-9; 1Thes 4:5; 2Thes 1:8; 1John 4:8
    - iii) This is talking about intellectual knowledge, without willful trust.
    - iv) Enough knowledge to make one culpable and guilty before God, but not enough to bring salvation.
    - v) Like demons, who know that God exists, but do not have saving faith; which is knowing, agreeing and trusting in Christ. James 2:19
  - b) This innate knowledge of God has been from the beginning, *"since the creation of the world."* – Rom 1:20
  - c) God is *"clearly seen"* and *"understood"* by . . . *"His invisible attributes . . . His eternal power . . . divine nature . . . through what has been made"* Rom 1:20

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<sup>1</sup> See: Gen 3:14-19; 6:5; 8:21; 1Kgs 8:46; 2Chr 6:36; Prov 20:9; Ps 14:1-3; 51:5; 53:1-3; 130:3-4; 143:2; Eccl 7:20; Jer 17:9; Lam 3:39; Matt 7:11; 15:18-20; Rom 1:18-3:23; 5:12,15-19; 6:23; 7:5-25; 8:7,20; 11:32; 1Cor 15:21-22; Gal 3:10,22; 5:17; Eph 2:1-3; 4:17-19; Col 1:21; 2:13; Titus 3:3; James 1:14-15; 1John 1:8-10; 3:4.

6) God reveals Himself through His creation.

Ps 8:1; 19:1-7; 50:6

- a) Externally, what we see around us.
  - i) Such as the complexity and uniformity of nature.
  - ii) And the orderliness and beauty of creation.
- b) Internally, because we are made in God's image.
  - i) We believe in, and argue from and for, such universals as truth, beauty, goodness, justice, love, kindness, faithfulness, etc.
  - ii) If these things are just mere conventions of man then they have no transcendent, universal, objective meaning.

7) "Therefore *they are without excuse.*"

Rom 1:20

- a) Why? Again they know God: "*for even though they knew God*" – **Rom 1:21**
  - i) They refused to honor/glorify and give thanks to God.
  - ii) Rather they became demented, since the foundation of their thinking is wrong.
  - iii) Thus they "*became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools*" – **Rom 1:21b-22**
- b) All thinking that isn't based on Christ will, in the end, becomes foolish.

8) This is seen when the unbeliever will come to worship and trust in anything besides God.

- a) They "*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.*" – **Rom 1:23**
- b) The ancients worshiped their pagan gods, made images of men or animals.
- c) Moderns usually don't worship gods, but we do make idols out of nature (such as a worship of science) and especially ourselves, who we believe are autonomous and the final authority.

9) Do you believe Romans 1:18-23?

10) It has great implications on how we engage in evangelism and sanctification.

### **Romans 1:18-23 and Evangelism**

1) Debating/witnessing with someone who is delusional is a very particular task.

2) This doesn't mean that we are condescending or arrogant.

- a) Because it is only by the grace of God that anyone believes! Eph 2:8-9
- b) Remember the apologist's favorite verse: "*sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense (literally "an apologetic") to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;*" – **1Peter 3:15**

3) However, to be drawn into the unbeliever's foolishness is wrong.

- a) "*Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will also be like him. Answer a fool as his folly deserves, that he not be wise in his own eyes.*" – **Proverbs 26:4-5**
- b) Do you give evidence to a delusional person?
- c) When the Scriptures clearly teach they already have enough evidence?

- d) Talking about the complexity of the eye, or how prophecy is fulfilled in Scripture, to someone who hates God is foolish.
  - e) It is encouraging the unbeliever to sit in judgment of God!
    - i) To illustrate the problem: Ask a hardened atheist that if you give them enough evidence, by their own standards, to believe in God, would they worship Him?
    - ii) They will answer, “no, I would hate Him.”
    - iii) Doesn’t this show the nature of the problem?
  - f) It is also seen in how the average unbeliever reacts to conversations about salvation from God’s holy wrath against sin, which is only by the cross of Christ.
- 4) There is a place for evidence, but it is best for those who are open to it, by the grace of God.
  - 5) When talking with unbelievers you need to expose the foolishness that their thinking isn’t based on God, in a kind and gentle way.
    - a) For we are called to destroy “*speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*” – **2Corinthians 10:5**
    - b) For example, if they say God is evil then ask them . . .
      - i) By what universal, revealed standard of good are they judging God?
      - ii) They will probably say there is no universal concept of good or evil, but a mere convention of man.
      - iii) So, if there is no such thing as evil, how can God be evil?
    - c) Or if they say “there is no truth” ask them “is that a true statement?”
    - d) You see the atheist is a poacher on royal land; they have to use the things of God (logic, reason, truth, etc.) to prove God doesn’t exist, which is foolish (illogical & immoral).
    - e) If you have to give an atheist evidence then give them atheists themselves!
      - i) They cannot live, or even think, without assuming universals.
      - ii) Which can only come from God.

### **Romans 1:18-23 and Sanctification**

- 1) More importantly, Romans 1:18-23 is a great sanctification verse.
- 2) Don’t forget how the apologist’s favorite verse (1Pet 3:15) begins . . .  
“*but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts*”
- 3) The more you understand how foolish is the world and its futile speculations the more you will flee it and cling to Christ.
- 4) The fact the world has to use the things of God to reject God shows how true Rom 1:18-23 is.
- 5) **1Corinthians 1:18-25.**