

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
June 26, 2016

Lesson Text: Romans 1:18-23, 28-32
Lesson Title: Ignoring God's Clear Truth

Introduction

It has been said Paul the Apostle was one of the greatest Christians of all ages. He was without question the man who was consumed by a divine passion, to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ anywhere and everywhere. As powerful as the gospel is, there is one thing the gospel cannot do: it cannot save any man until that man sees himself as a guilty, lost, condemned sinner. Therefore, before Paul wrote to the Romans about the glorious results of God's saving grace, he lays the groundwork for his case against man's self-righteousness. His aim is to show the whole world is morally bankrupt and subject to God's wrath and judgment.

God gives every person clear truth in His infallible Word. His truth is presented through purposeful commands and precise boundaries. While these commands and boundaries may at first appear restrictive and negative, they are actually freeing and positive to all who will obey.

Moses acknowledged God's clear truth was our best friend when he challenged the nation of Israel with these words: *"And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?"* (Deuteronomy 10:12-13). The Psalmist wrote, *"Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart"* (Psalm 119:1-2).

Cultural and moral tolerance is designed to replace God's clear truth with man's opinion, personal preference, or the individual's views or feelings. The Apostle Paul did not practice cultural or moral tolerance. His teaching in Romans 1:18-32 proves the Apostle did not embrace political correctness. His teaching is also some of the most sobering to be found in the Bible. It presents a graphic picture of the depravity of man and the degradation that takes place within people who ignore biblical truth. Paul's teaching is quite clear that God, in turn, gives those who ignore His truth over to sexual impurity, and reprobate minds. Anyone who ignores God's truth will face certain judgment from the Lord.

The Revelation (Romans 1:18-20)

Verse 18

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;”

Because of God’s hatred of sin, His “wrath” is “revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. God’s “wrath” is as essential to His righteousness as is His love and mercy. If God ceased to be a God of “wrath” He would also cease to be a God of love.

The “wrath of God” is His holy aversion to all that is evil, and His purpose is to destroy it. It is His “settled, determined indignation,” not a spur of the moment emotion. When God’s holiness collides with man’s sinfulness, the result is “wrath.” God could not be God if He did not react to evil.

The words “is revealed” is in the present tense in the Greek and might be read like this: “The wrath of God is being revealed continually.” The “wrath” of God is being revealed continually upon those who break the laws of God. There are three basic areas where God reveals His “wrath.” First, you can see it in the Bible (John 3:36). If you are unsaved, God is not your Father. He is your judge, jury and executioner. Second, you can see the “wrath of God” in the cross (Matthew 27:46). What happened at Calvary is far too deep even for the most mature believer to understand. But one thing we know is God’s “wrath” was poured out upon His Son!

Illus. Preacher and author, Donald Barnhouse writes, “The wrath of God is like water behind a dam. At periods in history, God scooped out a hand full of the waters of His wrath and sprinkled it on parts of humanity. But at Calvary, God opened the flood gates on his Son.”

Third, you can see God’s “wrath” in the natural world. Sin causes disease and violation of God’s creative order, which brings results. God is not a passive old man who ignores sin. The “wrath” of God is being experienced by many now, even before the day of final judgment.

Notice the objects of God’s “wrath” are the “ungodly” and the “unrighteous.” The “ungodly” are those who sin against the being of God in their attitudes and actions. This has to do with religion. “Unrighteousness” is sin against the will of God. This has to do with morality. Humans are both religious sinners (they are ungodly and live as if there is no God) and moral sinners (they are unrighteous and live as if God’s will has not been revealed). Both refer to a lack of reverence and worship of God. “All” means it does not matter who you are, who your parents were or what you have achieved in life. No one escapes the wrath of God!

“Of them who hold the truth in unrighteousness” is the reason or basis for God’s wrath. Men suppress the truth by their sin. Sin is in the heart of man so strong that it assaults the truth. “Hold” means “suppress, hold down, keep back.” The “ungodly” and the “unrighteousness” restrain the truth of God’s righteousness. Those who fail to listen to God’s voice today are suppressing the truth and that is justification for God’s wrath now and in future judgment. People resent the indictments of conscience and try to suppress the truth which makes them aware of their accountability before God. They laugh off the fact that men reap what they sow and rationalize because they do not want to face the truth that God’s wrath against sin is real (Galatians 6:7).

Verse 19

“Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.”

The key word to what Paul is saying here is “Because.” God is justified in His wrath against sinners because of the revelation of Himself to all mankind. Paul’s point here is that, even apart from His written revelation, “because that which may be known of God is manifest in them” even pagan Gentiles know of God, “for God hath shewed it unto them.” The Lord testifies through Paul that His outward, visible manifestation of Himself is universally known by man. The knowledge of God is “manifest in them” as well as around them. All men have evidence of God, and what their physical senses can perceive of Him their inner senses can understand to some extent. Nature and the world in which we live give us clues that God is the Supreme person, He is real, above His creation and not part of it.

Verse 20

“For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:”

God revealed Himself through the created universe, and every man has that revelation. “The invisible things of him from the creation of the world” means God’s invisible attributes are “clearly seen, being understood” by the things God created. God has surrounded us in the evidence of His creation and handiwork. When a man can look out, look up, and look around at the created universe and fail to see and confess the “eternal power and Godhead,” he is a man holding down the truth. He holds down the truth, not because he cannot see it, but because he is ungodly and unrighteous.

The testimony of nature alone is sufficient to lead any person to an understanding of the righteousness and holiness of God. If any man rejects

that testimony, “they are without excuse” for the judgment which they bring on themselves. They are guilty because they have suppressed the truth.

The Rejection (Romans 1:21-23)

Verse 21

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”

The problem with sinful man is not that he is ignorant of God. Paul says, “...they knew God.” The clause, “when they knew God” refers to an original experiential knowledge of God. When they “knew” God deserved to be glorified, they willfully chose not to glorify Him as God. To add injury to insult, Paul said sinful man is not “thankful” for what God provides. Failure to give God thanks for His provisions is the result of a process of self-delusion.

The “vain imaginations” or the “empty working of the mind” of sinful man brings him to a dead-end road where “their foolish heart” is “darkened.” Truth is often pictured in the Scriptures as light. Paul says “their foolish heart was darkened.” That means it gets harder for their hearts to accept truth when they are exposed to it.

In order to reject the testimony of nature to the righteousness and holiness of God, sinful man had to develop a thinking or reasoning process that created human solutions to spiritual problems. Their “foolish hearts” (actually minds) were “darkened” by senseless thinking.

The “foolish heart” is not one simply lacking in intelligence; it is a heart deficient in the biblical understanding of who God is and therefore incapable of righteousness and godliness.

Verse 22-23

“Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.”

The key word here is “themselves” because it was the assumption of sinful man that wisdom dwelt within themselves which caused them to become “fools.” The Greek word for “fools” is *moraino* {mo-rah-ee-no}. It is the word from which we get our English word “moron.”

Since God is the Source of all wisdom (Proverbs 1:7), those who ignore Him deprive themselves of truth in every aspect of life. They make themselves

vulnerable to half-truths and outright lies. They lose their ability to discern between reality and fantasy. As a result of the loss of the ability to discern, lost humanity sometimes creates “images made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things” (v.23). In so doing, they break the first and second commandment by worshipping idols. The creature is worshipped instead of the Creator.

Idolatry is the consequence of suppressing the truth of God. Anytime man makes an “image” he denies the rightful place that belongs only to God. When man refuses to worship God he will worship anything.

The Results (Romans 1:28-32)

Verse 28

“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;”

“They” and “them” refer to those sinners mentioned in Romans 1:24-27 whom God gave up to sexual impurity. They lusted after one another and ended up dishonoring their own bodies. God has given millions of people today over to disgusting sexual passions and perversions because they have suppressed the truth.

“Gave them over” describes an active decision, not passive neglect. When sinful humanity ignores the truth of God, He will at some point actively give them over to their lust, not out of frustration or resignation, but to accomplish His purpose. Perhaps a good example of this can be seen in Numbers 11:4-6, where the Lord responded to Israel’s question about what they were going to eat. The Lord said, *“Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; But even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the LORD which is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?”* (Numbers 11:19-20).

Similarly, God says to sinful humanity, in effect, “If you want to practice homosexuality, lesbianism, fornication, and wickedness, I will let you have it until it comes out of your nostrils and you are sick of it.”

The “reprobate mind” means “a worthless mind.” People who have a “reprobate mind” are too sinful to know what sinful is. People with reprobate minds march in gay pride parades; engage in same sex relationships; accuse Christians of hate speech and bigotry when they share God’s truth concerning biblical marriage.

Verse 29-31

“Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:”

“Being filled” suggests that sinful humanity is not simply tainted by the catalogue of sins listed, but are, in fact, saturated with them. When God’s truth is suppressed, the result is:

- 1) Unrighteousness-the rejection of God’s standard of righteousness
- 2) Fornication-sexual sin, including adultery and incest
- 3) Wickedness-delighting in wrongdoing
- 4) Covetousness-greed, wanting what we do not need
- 5) Maliciousness-depravity, naughtiness
- 6) Envy-displeasure aroused by seeing someone with something we want
- 7) Murder-the taking of human life
- 8) Debate-quarreling or contention
- 9) Deceit-craftiness
- 10) Malignity-bad character
- 11) Whisperers-those who destroy someone’s reputation in secret
- 12) Backbiters-those who destroy someone’s reputation openly
- 13) Haters of God-those who resent God and work to exclude Him from life
- 14) Despiteful-treating others with contempt
- 15) Proud-making unwarranted claims of superiority
- 16) Boasters-bragging about oneself
- 17) Inventors of evil things-creative in thinking up ways to sin

18) Disobedient to parents-if you can disregard parental authority it is a rejection of God's authority and it will destroy individuals and nations.

19) Without understanding-stupidity, willingly senseless, fools

20) Covenantbreakers-cannot be trusted

21) Without natural affection-the moral framework is missing

22) Implacable-inability to agree upon or enter a moral agreement

23) Unmerciful- no love, without mercy

Verse 32

“Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.”

When sinful man participates in the above catalogue of sins it is proof he has willfully and intentionally ignored God's clear truth. Paul laments the fact that sinners who knew God would judge them and punish them for committing such sins would actually continue to sin, anyway. Knowing that sinners “are worthy of death” who do such things did not deter them, but rather they did “the same” sins and in addition, had “pleasure in them.”

The word “pleasure” may be translated “applaud.” Sinful people not only do these things, but they applaud others who do them. Homosexuals, adulterers, greedy people, gossipers, covenant breakers, disobedient children, and everyone else in Paul's list may appear to be “happy little sinners,” but God will have the last laugh (Psalm 2:4).

Conclusion

God's truth is our best friend, and it is a serious matter when people ignore it. While cultural tolerance may disguise itself as caring, understanding, and loving, it lacks the moral authority of God's clear truth.

Paul's inescapable conclusion is that every man has a witness of God in nature and is therefore inexcusable. Nevertheless, they have deliberately suppressed the witness of truth and have chosen the course of their own making. Thus, God has revealed His wrath from heaven in giving them over to their ungodly and fleshly desires.

All who ignore God's clear truth are lost, deserving of God's wrath, and destined for eternal punishment in the lake of fire. It is the just compensation

for ignoring God's truth. The only remedy is to repent and turn to the Lord for salvation. The truth you reject today is the truth you will be judged by tomorrow. The truth you accept today is the truth you will rejoice in for eternity.

Amen.