

Paul has just told us in verses 16 and 17 that he is not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Righteousness is by faith from beginning to end. The one who by faith is righteous shall live. But now Paul is about to tell us of those who will refuse to believe and be saved. They refuse to exercise the faith that reaches out and takes hold of the righteousness of God offered to them that they might live.

If we will not receive the righteousness of God, we are left in our own unrighteousness. That is to say not being right in the way we live. It is to be contrary to the goodness of God. It is to be the opposite of what God is. The wrath of God is revealed for such as these (Ephesians 5:6). *18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* Romans 1:18 (ESV) Our culture has suppressed the truth for so long now that this verse is almost impossible for many to hear.

I came across one such man that I had seen for years around town and simply asked how his health was. For the following fifteen minutes I received a lecture on the absurdity of Christianity, the Bible, belief in God, conservatism, and faith in general. He told me how great his doctors are. Along with a pitch to join his multi-level marketing program, all in one non-stop monolog. After all, if you live for now and hope that when you die it is all over, you better find the best doctors and make a lot of money so that you can to pay for them. Except for the grace of God there go you and I. He suppressed the truth and preaches about his materialistic search for temporal pleasure before he dies.

He was a preacher of unrighteousness. To him, and to much of the world, the wrath of God is some fable to get people to behave. But the Bible teaches that it is the justice of a holy and righteous God upon those who suppress the truth (1:25). As we'll see in the following verses, it isn't that they don't know the truth. It isn't that they just were misinformed. They willingly and intentionally ignored God speaking to them and revealing Himself to them (2Chronicles 24:20-21). Instead of receiving the truth and the righteousness of God and declaring the truth of God's gracious and holy nature, they suppress the truth. They teach another Jesus which isn't really good news at all (2Corinthians 11:4), but is a destructive lie.

Does anyone in their heart of hearts really think that a stopping a beating heart in a womb is okay with God? Does anyone really think our world and our life is some huge accident? Can we look at the human body and say homosexuality is natural and healthy? We know in our heart of hearts what is right, but we sure can suppress the truth when we want to.

Commented [notes1]: Romans 1:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ 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.
¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Commented [notes2]: Ephesians 5:6 (ESV)

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Commented [notes3]: Romans 1:25 (ESV)

²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Commented [notes4]: 2 Chronicles 24:20-21 (ESV)

²⁰ Then the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people, and said to them, "Thus says God, 'Why do you break the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.'"
²¹ But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the LORD.

Commented [notes5]: 2 Corinthians 11:4 (ESV)

⁴ For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

Talking about the wrath of God, about hell, is out of favor today. You'll rarely hear a sermon on it. I think it is partly because it makes people uncomfortable and therefore doesn't grow your church. It is the truth or it is a lie. People will one day stand before a holy God and give an account of why they did not receive His righteousness by faith and live, and instead chose to suppress the truth that God revealed to them (Romans 14:10). That is what Jesus taught (Luke 12:48). In fact, Jesus said, you'd be better to gouge out your eye than to let it lead you into hell where the worm never dies and the fire never goes out (Mark 9:47-48). Jesus was much more interested in proclaiming the truth than having a large following.

The general attitude today is that one is a pretty good person and so God would never do something like that to them. They've heard of the God of love (1John 4:8), but they never heard about the necessity of the wrath of God. Without justice, God would be a compromising master of chaos. There has to be justice if there is to be heaven. There has to be justice if God is holy.

The key words describing these that suppress the truth is the opposite of what God is. God is godly. They are ungodly. God is righteous. They are unrighteous. And that was true of every one of us before we, by grace alone, exercised the faith given to us to receive the truth and the righteousness of God (2Corinthians 5:21). It was only faith. We didn't deserve it. Christ earned it. That means I can't get angry with that man, but rather that I should pray for his eyes to be opened to see the fate that awaits him if he will not stop suppressing the truth.

The word translated as suppress also means to withhold. Listen to the next verse. ¹⁹ *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.* Romans 1:19 (ESV) They know it but they don't like it, and refuse to yield to it. Instead, they suppress it with distortion and point to the shortcomings of Christians. They have to spew that venom because they are convincing themselves to continue to go down that road of Ungodliness and Unrighteousness. God has shown them plainly and yet they go headlong in the other direction. It is a choice (Joshua 24:15). You've heard me say before and it bears repeating because of this passage, there will be no one in hell who hasn't had a revelation of God. There will only be those who chose to be there and who would be miserable in heaven. That is because heaven is all about Jesus and they want it to be all about them. Hell will be filled with self-focused people who can't understand why everyone else is so selfish. In heaven, Jesus is Lord and we'll love it. In hell, everyone is their own lord and they'll hate it.

Paul goes on to explain why it has been made plain to everyone. ²⁰ *For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.* Romans 1:20 (ESV) There are two gospels, the gospel of created things

Commented [notes6]: Romans 14:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;

Commented [notes7]: Luke 12:48 (ESV)

⁴⁸ But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

Commented [notes8]: Mark 9:47-48 (ESV)

⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'

Commented [notes9]: 1 John 4:8 (ESV)

⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Commented [notes10]: 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Commented [notes11]: Joshua 24:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.'

and the divinely revealed Word of God. Certainly the Bible is the clearest, but God has a gospel message in creation that plainly reveals Himself to all mankind.

One argument against the gospel that has been so effective in our day is, "What about the people that never heard?" Paul is going to make it very clear that salvation is by faith (5:1). God reveals Himself to man through creation or the proclamation of the Word and every man makes a choice. Notice the words, "clearly perceived". There is not a soul that has ever been born that did not have a clear choice. Jesus made the way (John 14:6). He made salvation possible. The Holy Spirit invites, and man decides. Abraham did not have the whole story, but he believed and it was counted to him as righteousness (4:3). He extended that hand of faith. He did not understand that Jesus was to be born the Word incarnate and die for his sins (1John 2:2). He simply believed that God would make a way. He trusted in God and chose to go the way of God and not to serve himself. He let God be Lord of his life and obeyed by faith.

It happens all over the world today. People who have no access to the gospel are being given dreams and visions and called to exercise their faith and come out of their culture's mindset (10:13). They see the wickedness and they cry out for truth, and God gives it to them. Where there are Bibles or believers, He guides them to those.

Creation clearly reveals God where no believer has proclaimed the good news. Psalm 19 declares that the heavens proclaim the glory of God. Did you know that the earth's location in our galaxy is far enough from the center so that we are aren't bombarded with radiation? We are far enough from the arm of the galaxy so that we can observe distant stars. If we were further in, our night sky would be filled with just the stars in our own arm of the galaxy. Our moon is just the right distance from the earth and just that right size so we can see a perfect solar eclipse and learn about the sun and solar flares. Its location and size keep the earth at the right tilt for our seasons. Its gravitational pull stirs the oceans which provides a large part of our oxygen and moderates our climate. The more we learn about nature around us the more we are in awe of God and His design.

There is a devotional called *Inspired Evidence* by Julie Von Vett and Bruce Malone that is a collection of 365 marvels of nature and a Scripture verse with each. Let me give you just a couple of examples. Bats hunt by emitting high frequency clicks and then sensing the echo of those clicks to locate their prey. Tiger moths are able to hear those clicks and do evasive loop-de-loop maneuvers. They can also emit their own clicks to jam the bats radar. If all else fails they will fold their wings and dive bomb to the earth. God is the amazing designer.

Who hasn't wondered about the firefly? But did you know there are numerous creatures that use bioluminescence, from single cell creatures to deep sea jelly fish. The light is produced when the creature combines two chemicals that the creature produced. In

Commented [notes12]: Romans 5:1 (ESV)

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Commented [notes13]: John 14:6 (ESV)

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Commented [notes14]: Romans 4:3 (ESV)

³ For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."

Commented [notes15]: 1 John 2:2 (ESV)

² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Commented [notes16]: Romans 10:13 (ESV)

¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Commented [notes17]: Psalm 19:1 (ESV)

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

some creatures it serves the purpose of attracting a mate. In other creatures it serves to attract food. You would think they all would be using the same chemicals, but no, there are 40 different variations of chemical combinations! God is the amazing chemical engineer!

The metamorphosis of a butterfly is unexplainable to naturalists. The caterpillar will devour as many leaves as it can and then spin itself into a cocoon and turn into mush. The concoction reassembles into a completely different creature that emerges to fly away and lay its eggs and start the cycle again.

It's no wonder Jesus kept referring to nature. He designed it to teach us spiritual things. He used the creation to teach, the lilies of the field, the birds of the air (Matthew 6:26-30), light and darkness, seeds sown for agriculture, weeds, sheep, wolves, snakes, doves, moths, rust, decay, yeast, grape vines, figs, wheat, dogs, and I'm probably forgetting some, all object lessons used by Jesus.

We can see resurrection in stages of the life of butterflies and seeds. Our local cicada is another example, buried in the ground for years before it comes out and flies and sings its song. We see the stages of life in the seasons that begin again with new life. We see kindness of God upon all mankind in the rain that comes each season (Matthew 5:45). And we could go on and on. We study our Bibles, as well we should, but we also need to let God speak to us through His creation. One of the few things worth seeing from the entertainment world are nature documentaries. In spite of their secular slant, you can see the wonder of God in His creation. He designed it to show man His invisible attributes, eternal power, and divine nature.

Those who reject the message they clearly see in creation have no excuse. No one will ever be able to tell God they didn't have a chance or didn't know what they were doing. The only ones that can't see are those who refuse to see. God has made it plain to all.

²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Romans 1:21 (ESV) They knew God! The problem is they refused to honor Him or give Him thanks for all they have received. This is one way to tell a believer. They always give honor to God and are continually thankful. The unbeliever boasts in their abilities and what they have done. They honor themselves.

These were once given light because Jesus is the light that lights every man that comes into the world (John 1:9). But through their own choices they became darkened. Their thinking became futile. This is one thing that baffles me. When you discuss the world with an unbeliever, they express more faith than we do. If you ask where matter came from, all they can say is that it always was. What a leap of faith. Science tells them that if that were the case it would have run out of energy long ago and be a stagnant universe. When you ask how order on such a massive and micro scale came about, they

Commented [notes18]: Matthew 6:26-30 (ESV)

²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Commented [notes19]: Matthew 5:45 (ESV)

⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Commented [notes20]: John 1:9 (ESV)

⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

say it was random while the laws they know to be true contradict such a possibility. Reason goes out the window. But then they will declare the Christian ignorant. Who is suppressing truth?

I look at my fingers typing the sermon and wonder at the complexity of what is taking place. My mind is meditating on the passage. The Holy Spirit illumines the text. My thoughts come together and nerve impulses fly from my brain through nerves to the muscles in my fingers that contract pushing letters in just the right order to make sentences that communicate the inspiration. It's a little miracle I take it for granted. I just expect it to always be that way. Thinking it is an accident of randomness is evidence of futile thinking of foolish darkened hearts.

Paul said something similar in the letter to the Ephesians. ¹⁷ *Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.* Ephesians 4:17-18 (ESV) It is the hard heart that has futile thinking. The vast majority of great scientists that discovered the laws by which the physical world functions believed they were searching for the mind of God as they studied creation.

²² *Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.* Romans 1:22-23 (ESV) Nothing has changed. They still claim to have a corner on truth while they depend on randomness and time to create beauty and order. What foolishness! Instead of worshiping our glorious Creator, they worship idols. Today the idols are still human form. That is why pornography is such a problem in our world. While we owe our very existence in this fragile world to our all-knowing, glorious and merciful Creator, man spends a good deal of his time trying to prove there is no God and that our very existence is an accident with no meaning. To them, that is wisdom. How foolish! They would like man to just be one of the animals, with no moral boundaries, no created purpose, and no eternal existence. The psalmist was being to the point when he wrote, "The fool says in his heart, there is no God." Psalm 14:1

Paul has declared that no one will have an excuse before God. What can be known about God is plain to them. God created the world in such a way that it would be clear to all. It is only the hardness of our hearts that invites the darkness to replace the light. They reject any idea of the wrath of God but it will be revealed from heaven because God is just. **Ungodliness and unrighteousness will be dealt with, and our only escape is righteousness we obtain by faith in Jesus.** God who sends rain on the just and unjust makes faith available to all, but only those who extend that hand of faith will know life (John 3:36).

Questions

Commented [notes21]: Psalm 14:1 (ESV)

¹ The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.

Commented [notes22]: John 3:36 (ESV)

³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

- 1 Who will face the wrath of God?
- 2 Did they know the truth?
- 3 Did Jesus preach about hell?
- 4 Why must God be just?
- 5 What is so different between heaven and hell?
- 6 How was Abraham saved?
- 7 Review some wonders of nature.
- 8 Will anyone have a good excuse for not being saved? Why or why not?
- 9 What happened in verse 21?
- 10 Who is a fool?
- 11 What does man worship?