

“You Have No Excuse”

Romans 1:18-25

September 15th, 2019

Sometimes we can blame God for our sin. One Sunday morning, a policeman in a small town was parked in a parking lot when he saw a car swerving all over the road. Taking off in hot pursuit, the officer pulled the driver over, and recognized him as a drunk by the name of Frank.

The policeman said, "Frank, you're driving all over the road." Frank said, "I'm just trying to get to church, officer." Noticing a bottle on the seat next to Frank, the policeman asked, "What's that on your seat, Frank?" "It's just water," he said. "Give it to me," the officer demanded. He took a whiff. "That's *not* water," he said. "That's wine." Frank just looked up to heaven and said, "Wow, He did it again."

At one time or another, most people have woken up on Sunday morning, and they just didn't feel like going to church. I'm not one of these, but they exist. I've condensed a list of actual excuses that people have used to justify their absence from worship on Sunday.

- Church is full of hypocrites (Wal-Mart is too, but you still go there).
- I can't come without my spouse (you must to share what was preached for her soulcare!).
- Someone I don't like goes there (don't give someone else that kind of power over you).
- It's just too hard to get my kids up to go (Uh, do you get them up during the week for school?)
- I can't come to church because I have problems with gas.
- I haven't gotten to see my family much this week (Maybe you should bring them to church).
- I have friends/family visiting this weekend (Maybe you could bring them to church, too).
- I will go to church when things get right between me and God. (That'll not happen apart from church)

There are just a few legitimate reasons to miss the hour and 15 minutes we call worship on Sunday mornings. Work, severe/contagious illness, travel, hospitalization, imprisonment, or death come to mind. *Are there others?* Can't think of any.

Sadly, it is true that people also give flimsy excuses for why they don't worship and serve Almighty God. The people the Apostle Paul addressed in his letter to Rome were some of them. Paul's answer to such people was that they didn't have any legitimate excuses.

Romans 1:18-25:

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. 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, ²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

²⁴ Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

To properly understand Scripture, we must consider the context in which the verse or passage is situated. Last week's passage ended with two verses (**Romans 1:16 & 17**), which proclaim the theme of the entire letter of Romans. Where they spoke of the gospel containing "the righteousness of God," verse 18 in today's passage mentions "the wrath of God." Where *righteousness* referred to having a right standing with God, *wrath* refers to God's fair, right anger.

The pattern Paul uses here infers that God's righteousness cannot be properly understood apart from God's wrath. In other words, we can't truly and fully appreciate the good news of the gospel without also considering the bad news that all of humanity faces. Commentator Leon Morris notes, "The gospel is necessary *because* there is such a thing as the wrath of God. Apart from this the gospel has no meaning" (Morris, 75)

That bad news is the theme of today's passage. Actually, Paul unpacks the bad news from today's passage all the way through **Romans 3:20**. In this extended passage, Paul shows his readers why we need God to give us righteousness.

Today, as we look at **Romans 1:18-25**, it is helpful for us to see in these verses what **God is doing and what we – sinful humans – do**. We'll begin with those things discussed in these verses that portray what humans do. And, it's not pretty.

Verse 18 teaches that it is humankind that "suppresses the truth." This is because those who stand in opposition to God are both ungodly and unrighteous according to verse 18. "Ungodliness" ('Godlessness') means people are opposed to God. In our natural state, we do not like God. "Unrighteousness," also known as "wickedness," refers to what people do because of this determined opposition. They (we?) reject the truth about God, which He reveals of himself in nature to the entire human race.

This is a theological doctrine known as "natural" or "general" revelation because God reveals Himself through what He has made (nature), and He reveals Himself in this way to every single human being – past, present, and future. That means that God has made it plain for us to know Him. It's as if a world full of billboard signs has been planted in order to point to God's existence!

The late James Montgomery Boice notes here, "There is enough evidence of God in a flower to lead a child as well as a scientist to worship Him. There is sufficient evidence in a tree, a stone, a grain of sand, even a fingerprint, to make us glorify God and thank Him." (Boice, 143)

Verse 21 teaches that sinful humans know God, but they don't glorify Him as God. That means that we cannot plead ignorance of God! Sinful humans are aware there is a God. The person who doesn't believe there is a God is truly foolish! Dense! Thick-headed! "Every human being knows of God and clearly perceives Him, but rejects that knowledge. For that, every person is exposed to the wrath – the righteous anger – of God." (Sproul, 41) "Our most fundamental sin as depraved humans (apart from the grace of God in Christ) is idolatry, which is the sin of refusing to honor God as He is." (Sproul, 42)

Verse 22 unveils the truth that sinful humanity is not thankful! People are not thankful because they don't accept what God has done for them. Given the placement of gratitude among such terrible elements as Godlessness and wickedness in Paul's letter, our ingratitude is high treason to a God Who has gone a great extent to prove Himself even to those who say they don't believe in Him,

Verse 22 points out that it is the fool who professes to be wise, but changes the glory of the incorruptible God, replacing Him with corruptible gods and images. Among those are birds, animals, and creeping things.

We'll return to this thought when we get to **Romans Chapter 3**, but the Old Testament foretold the role of the fool in the Bible's Psalter. **Psalms 14** and **53** begin identically with these words:

“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’
They are corrupt, they have done abominable works,
There is none who does good.

The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men,
To see if there are any who understand, who seek God.
They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt;
There is none who does good, no, not one.”

Verse 25 says truth gets replaced with lies. This exchange causes depraved people to worship creation instead of the Creator. This is true because God made us to worship; He designed that we would worship Him in spirit and in truth (**John 4:23-24**). “We must worship something. (Because) we were created to worship the Creator, if we reject Him, we will worship something else.” (Keller, 27)

As we look to what God does in this passage, we can boil it down to two things. God reveals Himself (truth) as we see in verses 18 & 19, and He gives people over to their sin (as we see in verse 24).

There is enough evidence in the natural created order to convince people God exists. **Psalm 19**, which we read responsively earlier in the service, teaches us that created things bring glory to Almighty God. Here are the first 6 verses again:

“The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of His hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
Night after night they display knowledge.
There is no speech or language
Where their voice is not heard.
Their voice goes out into all the earth,
Their words to the ends of the world.” (NIV)

It always amazes me that a person can describe himself as an atheist even as he gazes outdoors at the beauty of the creation all around us. The arrogance of such selfishness! When we stoop to smell the roses, we see up close the incredible beauty of God's nature. It doesn't escape me that four of the things on my bucket list have to do with visiting beautiful things/places in nature – the sequoias in California, the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, and the Scottish highlands. I've seen many beautiful parts of this country – we seem to really be blessed of God to have such incredibly beautiful places – and there are so, so many more.

Yes, we serve a beautiful God Who makes beautiful things!

But, this beautiful God is also prepared to "give us over to uncleanness" as we see in verse 24. This means that God holds back things that can be harmful to us, at least for a season. There comes a time when he will no longer hold back, but will give us over to our sin and its consequences.

We must realize that God's judgment on ungodliness and unrighteousness is to give us what we want. "The things we serve will not free us; rather, they control us. We *have* to have them." (Keller, 29)

Tim Keller shares an example all can relate to. "Take a man who worships his career. He serves it as what will make him a "somebody." It drives him, and it dominates his life – everything else is fitted around it. The worst thing that can happen to him is promotion! It allows him to continue to think that he can find blessing in his desires. It convinces him that this is 'real life.' It enables him to forget the wreckage he is making of his marriage, his family, his friendships, in order to pursue his god." (Keller, 30)

I liken this to eating. There are some foods I like so much I could roll in them like a puppy dog! And, given my sugar, I shouldn't have them – piping hot cherry (or any berry) pie with ice cream on top has to be right at the top! Even so, if I continue to indulge myself such delightful and benign things actually become malignant things. Too much of a good thing is bad!

How does this apply to you?

You may be a self-professed atheist; I'd have you check your convictions against what the Bible says. Don't settle for being a fool. Investigate the truth of Jesus' blood shed for you.

You may profess to be a Christian. You're in worship more often than not. You think you're doing OK. *Are you?* Perhaps you're not where you think you are. You are a practical atheist if you live a life that contradicts God's Word. Become part of a bible study or invest in a study of God's Word with another believer in Jesus Christ.