

God's Righteousness In Romans – Part 1

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In Romans 1, Paul laid out one of the clearest expositions of the gospel's implications. Paul wrote, "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." (Rom. 1:16.) Then, in verse 17, Paul explained why the gospel is God's power for salvation, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." The gospel, the good news of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, is the expression of the righteous judgment of God against sin. But more than that, the gospel is the revelation of His plan for man's righteousness. How may sinful man be righteous before God? Paul says that God must be the source of man's righteousness and he would go on to explain that God bestows this blessing via forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice on our behalf.

But Paul recognized that if he was going to talk about the blessing of being righteous before God through the redeeming work of Jesus, he had to first talk about the need for that redeeming work. In other words, before he could talk about the good news of the gospel, he had to talk about the bad news. We can't appreciate the good news without first stopping to understand just how bad the bad news is.

Paul does this when he moves from the righteousness of God in 1:17 to the wrath of God in verse 18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" (Rom. 1:18.) What follows is a lengthy discourse on the sins of man and the reasons for them. Man forgot God and left himself as the only ruler. This led to selfish and with spiritual things out of the way, physical desires took over. Read Rom. 1:19-32 now.

Paul specifically focused on the idolatry of the pagan world resulting from their suppression of God's revelation in creation. Human beings already know God exists through His revelation in creation. No one has any excuse for not following God. That's Paul's argument. Man can only honor God and give Him thanks because God revealed Himself in creation. But man has made the choice to "suppress the truth" and go out on his own.

Christians often think that if they can just give enough evidence for God's existence, others will have no choice but to believe. But the problem with that is the unbeliever, by virtue of their unbelief, will take the evidence and interpret it according to their unbelief. The problem is not the evidence but what people do with the evidence. They may seek an answer from science, chock it up to an accident, or simply ignore it.

When people "suppress the truth," they become "futile in their thinking." God is our Creator but because we suppress that knowledge, we put ourselves in active rebellion against God. We have no right in judging our Creator or His existence. But we do. Anyone who dares believe in God is considered an ignorant fool or at best narrow-minded. But what man has done is become irrational in his thinking, not because the knowledge of God slipped his mind, but because he made it happen. He suppressed it. Unbelievers do have a relationship with God but it is not a good one. It is one waiting for the wrath of God because of sin. (Continued next week)