

Romans 1:18-21 **How God Reaches the Gentiles**

The book of Romans chapter 1, one of the great sections of Scripture. Remember that we are studying The Constitution of the Christian Faith. There is not any piece of Scripture, or section of Scripture that we as Gentiles need to know in Romans more than this one. Remember the book of Romans, Paul wrote to the Romans? He had never seen them. Paul later would arrive three years as a prisoner, but that would be his first time to Rome to see them. He wrote Romans as a legal brief as the first eleven chapters lay out the doctrines of the Christian faith. If a believer is familiar with the doctrines, the systematic theology that is presented in the book of Romans, you will have a grasp on every doctrine and every teaching of the Christian faith. Beginning with chapter 12 through chapter 16, it is Paul's presentation of the transformation and then His exhortation that takes place in the believer's life.

We are in Romans chapter 1 and today we begin, actually, the heart of the section. The first doctrine is The Doctrine of Condemnation. That is a legal term that belongs to the judiciary system that means *to have a sentence against you*. And the Bible presents that every believer - whether they are Gentile or Jewish, and a Gentile is anybody that is not Jewish: all the nations of the world. There is one nation that God has chosen and all the other are called *nations*, plural.

As we begin in Romans chapter 1 we are going to pick up verse 17 from last week:

17) For in it is the righteousness of God being revealed from faith into faith: as it has been written, "The just (or *righteous man*) shall live from out of faith" (as a source).

18) For the wrath of God is being revealed from Heaven upon (or *against*) all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who are holding (literally *suppressing*), the truth in unrighteousness;

19) because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has showed (or manifested) *it* to them.

20) For the invisible things of the One from creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood (or *perceived*) by the things that are made, even His eternal power and godhead (or literally, *divinity* or *deity*); so that they are without excuse.

The first phase of this section, and this this entire section is a process or a progression if you will. In verses 18 through 32 it is how God deals with and judges the Gentile. Very important. Chapter 2 is how God deals with and judges the Jewish person. And chapter 3 is a summary statement of how all - both Jew and Gentile - are sinners; once you learn what a sinner is from this section. And Paul lays it out step-by-step. And the first step is testimony. How does God reach the Gentile? We have not been born under the law. We have not been raised under the law of the Old Testament, nor have we been raised according to the Jewish culture and

Judaism in and of itself. We are just kind of a Heinz 57. We are kind of a mixed bunch of a bunch of stuff: religious thought that we been exposed to here in America.

In fact, I am convinced most of the time, that when somebody comes up and says, "What do I need to do to receive Christ?" And you tell them,

"First of all, you have to admit that you are a sinner."

"Okay, I am a sinner."

I can look back now and realize there are many people that do not know what a sinner is. "But if that is what I have to do." You know? Okay, you have to admit you are porcupine. "Okay, whatever, if that is going to get me into heaven, that is what I am," you know? Sticky situation.

Verse 17 now from last week says, In the gospel, for which Paul is not ashamed, **In it the righteousness of God is being revealed.** Verse 17. *Righteousness* and *justification* and *just*, all those words come from the same root. To be considered *righteous* or *justified* it means *to be right with God's law*. If you were to go down and face a fine for a traffic violation, you plead not guilty, go before the courts, and they listen to you, and they pronounce you as not guilty. You are justified. You are lined up with the laws. If they find you guilty, then you are guilty. What Paul calls a sinner.

So God's righteousness is being revealed, right now, present tense, from faith unto faith, among the believers. We bring a whole new set of moral and spiritual laws into the world in which we live. Many times we try to compromise because we know that we stick out like sore thumbs if we go by God's law. If we live according to God's word many people around us are going to be convicted and they are going to see that we live by a different persuasion, a different set of laws, and rules, and regulations. God is revealing His righteousness through His people, **As it has been written** (in Habakkuk 2:4), "**The just or the righteous man shall live from out of faith.**"

But then verse 18, not only is God's righteousness being revealed, listen to verse 18, **For the wrath of God is being revealed** (right now) **from heaven against all ungodliness** - that is an absence of respect for the Lord - **all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who are suppressing the truth in unrighteousness.** Notice again the present tense: right now the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

Now the term *wrath* - it is kind of an interesting term because Paul only used it three times in his letters. It does not refer to an emotional, impulsive response; that would be the word **θυμός** (thumos), where you get heated, and get hot, and start expressing one's anger. This is what is called - in fact the term itself represents a spiritual law: something that God has already put into place and is active right now automatically. It does not represent God looking at somebody, and then getting all upset, and getting angry, and smashing them. Then going, "Oh, I am sorry. Didn't really mean to ... got angry there for a minute so, I will help you now." It is a law that is built-in.

In fact, there are three ways in which God brings judgment. We know of The Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation chapter 20 when all people will be judged. There will be a judgment during the tribulation period when God will bring His judgments on the earth and people will have different phases in which they will have a chance to respond and receive Christ. But there is also a third - moving from back to forward - there is a third judgment right now that this text is talking about.

It is expressed by Paul in Galatians chapter 6 verses 7 and 8 where he says, **Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap. If you sow to the flesh you shall of the flesh reap corruption; if you sow to the Spirit you shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.** You reap what you sow. That is a built in law. It is not God responding in heated anger.

It is the wrath of God that is (right now) **continuously being revealed** (notice from where) **from out of heaven** (and it is) **against** (or more literally *upon*) **all irreverence and unrighteousness of men.** People are not living lined up with the Lord and His law and who have no respect for Him. These are people **who are holding the truth in** (or *suppressing it*) **in unrighteousness.** So please understand that right now God's wrath is being revealed from heaven upon and against all people who function with a disrespect, an irreverence for Him, and who are not seeking to line up with Him. But it says that they are holding or suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. The Bible teaches that every single Gentile, along with every single person, but this is specifically to the Gentiles. Every single Gentile knows about God. Period. There is no such thing as, "Well, what happens if these tribes never get reached?" The Bible says they are reached.

Let's read on. Verse 19, **Because that which may be known of God** - that is, what God has decided to reveal about Himself, not everything there is to know, but what God wants people to know about His deity and His power - **that which may be known of God is manifest in them.** The word *manifest* - the difference between the word *manifest* and the word *revelation*: *manifest* is a way of revealing, though it is *brought to light*. It comes from the word *light*. Something that was invisible now has light shed on it and now people know. It has to do with enlightenment if you will. **Because that which may be known of God is illuminated in them for God has illuminated it to them.**

What has He illuminated? Look at verse 20, **For the invisible things** - that would be God's invisible character and attributes, **invisible things of God of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen.** That is what the Greek word means. Clearly. Plainly. He is not hiding it from anybody. Being understood or literally perceived by the things that are made, creation. And those invisible things specifically are **his eternal power and Godhead.** The word *Godhead* means *deity* or *divinity*. **God's eternal power and Godhead so that they are without excuse.**

Where is the gospel in there? "Oh, well, we can preach about who created the world and connect that with Jesus Christ and then," no. There is no gospel here. There are no words. God has specifically chosen that since the Gentile is not raised under the law, therefore the law cannot convict them because we do not know what the law is. God has chosen - we will see this when

we get into chapter 3 and at the end of chapter 2 where Paul is going to say, the Gentile is convicted in his conscience whereas the Jew is convicted by the law. This is something we get confused about. We try to preach the gospel as though all Gentiles, they are Jews and they know the law. They do not know the law. We do not know the law. We do not know what the law means. "Oh! you have broken God's law." We start looking for a car with a red light flashing and, "He will write me my ticket I guess. Whatever I did." We do not understand God's law. We were never raised that way.

Please take note, specifically and in detail, how God reaches a Gentile, a non-Jewish nonreligious person, is through creation. John chapter 1 verse 9 says that God enlightens every single person coming into the world. You say, "But what about that tribe way over in some country that nobody can get to?" The Bible does not say that is on our shoulders. God says, "I guarantee that My Spirit is going to enlighten them about creation."

And I got to thinking about this the other day, and I bring it up every once in a while. I got to thinking how we - I think naturally like you do, I am not thinking about me, I am thinking about you. How busy we get, especially at night. We are down here running around, it is almost like our perspective of watching ants scurrying all over the place. Do you ever stop and look up? Wow! To think that vast universe is expressing intelligent design. It is not an accident. All of the relationship, especially in our solar system, between the moon and the sun and the earth and everything has to be just right. If the sun is any closer we are going to burn up. Moon is any closer we are going to be overcome with water. It all comes with relationship. And then as you expand out from that the millions and millions and millions of stars and galaxies. Wow. If you stop for a moment some night and take a look at that and just concentrate on how great and how big the Lord is and then bring your eyes back down to the horizontal around you. This is plastic, you know? This is like cardboard down here. But we are so busy. But one of the reasons why God has placed the stars and the sun and the moon and planets around us is it is a testimony as to who He is.

I will just give you an example. We shared this with you in our series on creation in Genesis chapter 1. Even the placing of the sun and the moon with the earth is all a design of God. Every day that God created in the book of Genesis expresses His divine nature and attributes. Everything. When you get to the fourth day and you are studying about God put the sun in its place and the moon in its place and stars in their place. Even the prophets of the Old Testament says, "That was God's testimony to us." Because when God sends His Sun of righteousness - interesting in Malachi it is S-U-N instead of S-O-N, Sun of righteousness because he is making a reference to the Sun as we know it today. Jesus said, **I am the light of the world**, it is in response to the Sun in relationship to the earth. And so He is making the establishment for us that God has put everything therefore a testimony as to who God is.

Here in our text Paul says God has guaranteed that He by His Spirit will illuminate every person and He personally will reveal certain things about Himself, specifically His eternal power and His eternal deity. Every person. What we are going to see in the rest of the chapter is God's judgment when people do not respond to that testimony and are drawn to Christ. What happens to them? It is a form a judgment.

But today I want to focus on just that one principle, in verses 19 and 20. We know that the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven. Phase number one, God's testimony and His witness to the Gentile is through creation.

In Psalm 19 verse 1, you might want to take note of that (Psalm 19:1-4). Even in the Old Testament the Tanak, the Jewish Scriptures, they knew. It says, **The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament** (that would be *the heavens*, the open space) **shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows knowledge.** If you to catch it here there is a language, spiritual language that is being spoken to peoples' hearts that goes beyond the language barrier. He says, **There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.** Do you understand that? "Well, they have never read a Bible, how are they going to get saved?" How narrow-minded we are! See that we are stuck into a religious system. It is like the Bible tells us, God does not need us at all. Zero. So that when someone stands before God and they say, "You never sent a missionary to my tribe." It is all a response to the light that He sends, that is what we are responsible for. The Bible says, **There is no speech nor language where their voice** (creation) **is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a Tabernacle for the sun.** S-U-N. So the sun has a Tabernacle of stars and planets and galaxies. And this is where Malachi picks up his presentation about the Sun of righteousness. S-U-N.

Also in Romans chapter 10, and we will get that when we get into chapter 10. Romans chapter 10 verses 13 to 18. A Scripture that we have all heard and misapplied, but we shall read it. Romans 10:13-18, **For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.** If you call upon Him to save you, He will save you, no problem. But then there is a problem. How can they call upon the Lord if they do not have the gospel preached to them? And if they do not have the gospel preached to them that means they have not heard a preacher; and if they have not heard a preacher, oh my goodness, God is in trouble.

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? You can see where all this is leading to. This is all to motivate you to get out and reach these people. **As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!** So, "People," they say, "the lost are out there. Why are you just sitting there? Why are you not volunteering? Why are you not going on the mission field? Unless somebody is sent and he preaches and they hear and believe how they are going be saved?"

My favorite response: "Let's keep reading." Verse 16, **But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah said, "Lord, who hath believed our report?" So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, "Have they not heard?" Yes truly, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.** The world has already heard. The world already knows that there is a God and through the knowledge, through creation that He has chosen to reveal Himself, they know that He is the eternal God and that his eternal power is on display.

"Well, I am not going to believe in God."

"Well, take a look up there."

The God who created the universe, do you want to stand before Him and tell Him that? Look how powerful He is. The Bible says He stretches out the heavens with the span of His hand. I do not want to be under His fist when He decides to bring the guilty verdict. They have heard, he says.

How about John chapter 3 verses 16 to 21. We know 16, **For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever shall believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.** (verse 17) **For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.** (verse 18) **He that believes on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not has been condemned already.** The Bible teaches that, according to Psalm 51, we are born into sin the very moment that we are conceived in the womb. We inherit a sin nature that is passed down - we will get that later in Romans. We are sinners at conception. We are born into sin.

And the Bible says that we are condemned already. Not because we heard the gospel and then refused to believe but because whether we have heard it or not we are guilty right off the bat because we have not ever believed. **Because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. Here is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.** Where is the Bible in there? The light. People in their spirits and their hearts are responding to the light. Light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light. They responded because their works were evil.

For every one that practices evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, in order that his deeds should not be convicted. Again, a judicial term. Present evidence for conviction that is what God's Spirit does. A conviction is not just a feeling, the Holy Spirit points out proof to us, presents evidence to us that we have sinned. We do not like that. We are convicted.

But he that practices the truth comes to the light, in order that his works may be made manifest, that they are worked by God. Here is what it says. Here is what it is boiling down to. The light of God has illuminated every heart and every spirit of every person. By spiritual response, not intellectual but spiritual, a person will either be drawn to the light or a person will try to get away from the light. That is why Jesus says, **I did not come to condemn the world, I am just the light of the world.** "Oh, you do not want to have anything to do with the light? Well, you just condemned yourself. You showed your condemnation. I am here." He did not come to pass judgment but He basically said, **I am the light.** If you do not respond well to the light that is what you will be judged for. A spiritual response.

It is established in the Old Testament that it is through creation. It is established in the New Testament, not only here in [Romans] chapter 1 but also chapter 10, that God's message has gone out and has reached the whole world. So does that mean that we are not to tell people about Christ? That is not what it means. As God gives us the opportunity to share, and His

Spirit enlightens us and energizes us, we are to share. But do not ever think that if you do not share with your neighbor and he goes to hell it is your fault. That is not true.

The Bible tells us - and again reading verses 19 and 20 of Romans chapter 1, **Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God is the one that manifested it to them.** In them. They know. **For the invisible things of Him from *the* creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood or perceived by the things that are made.** God's Spirit causes people to notice creation. And they also notice that there was a designer behind that creation. It does not make any difference what they say. If they say, "No, I do not believe that stuff." Well, you might not believe it, but you know. **Even His eternal power and Godhead so that they are without excuse.**

It says in verse 21, **Because when they knew God (not *if* but *when* they did) they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain or empty in their imaginations (that is, *their reasonings*) and their foolish heart was darkened.** So nonbelievers do not believe because they have refused God's enlightenment about God's eternal power and Godhead.

And we will see as we go through next week, they have substituted that testimony. In order to get away from it they have to substitute it with something else and worship things like corruptible man, and animals, and different things, in order to take its place. But I think it is fascinating that God tells us in His word, whether it is through us - it must be His Spirit, it is not us - or through creation, every single person is guaranteed to be reached with the truth of Christ and the truth of God, whether they come in contact with human beings or not.

Stop and think about it. In our thinking we think God is so small that if a human being does not go with this book, go to talk to people that God cannot manifest Himself to them. Notice it did not say convict them of their sin, or convict them. It is just you are either drawn to the light or you are not. You are convicted so you get away. Convicted of what? Look what you are doing. You are rebelling against God. You are trying to get away. Why is that?

So do you understand that when he talks about ungodliness and unrighteousness he is talking about an irreverence to God and a failure to line up with God, to submit to Him? It does not say anything about the law. It does not really say anything about the gospel. Because a Gentile for the most part - and I am even surprised today, have you ever talked to anybody that says, "I have never heard of Jesus Christ?" There are people out there that say that. "Well, I have heard the name but only when somebody swears." Or, "I know He is part of the Christian religion but I really do not know anything about it." That is because we are Gentiles. Or we get involved with Protestantism or Catholicism. Those are Gentile religions. They do not have anything to do with Judaism, the Old Testament, or anything. It is just our deal. And when we hear somebody talk about Christ, we say, "Oh yeah, I believe because I am part of one of those systems." No. We are messed up. It is not the system, that is our version of it.

The way God reaches the Gentile is through creation. Whether your mind and your intellect is aware of it or not, and whether your mind or your intellect can understand the things

of creation or not, there is a testimony there that there is an Intellectual Designer behind the universe. That people call Him *God* and it is a response to His enlightenment.

So that if I stand before God one day as a Gentile and I am not saved, and I say, "Oh those Christians! They are always arguing about their doctrines, the churches are all messed up." And I am standing before God and saying, "You know, if You really are going to hold me responsible you should have been better about presenting the truth to me because Your people just made it so confusing. I mean, you know, had I known the truth, of course I would've believed in You." And God is going to say, "You know, whether you know it or not My Spirit enlightened you to My existence, to My Deity, to my power."

"Oh yeah, when was that?"

"Oh, several times. And it was your heart that responded to reject."

Not the intellect of reason and logic. Especially people that are rejecting the things of Christ who like to give off all kinds of excuses. There are no excuses. They are without excuse. No person can stand before God and say, "I have an excuse. I am illiterate. I could not read the book." The book is for us. God is not limited like, "I gave you the book and you have to get that book over there to that person or else I cannot do My work!" Good grief.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem and they were praising Him, singing *Hosanna*, and worshiping Him as Messiah, the Pharisee says, "Tell them to be quiet." He said, "If I tell them to be quiet the rocks are going to cry out." We get the privilege of participating with God's Spirit in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. It is a privilege. Nobody should ever feel guilty. Nobody should ever be motivated out of guilt to get out there in the human effort and reach human beings. It should be out of love and concern and under the guidance of God's Spirit with the knowledge that He has already reached them and no one has an excuse.

We will learn about those excuses next week. And we will learn about how a person will reap from their rejection of the testimony not from me, not from you, not even from the Bible. Those who refuse the testimony of God's Spirit enlightening them to the invisible attributes of God. Fascinating study. Puts a whole new light on the difference between Gentiles and their churches and Jews and Judaism. Gentiles do not know what sin is. But it is a nice word, maybe it is things I do wrong. But we do not know what sin is. Well, we are going to find out.

But what a place to start. Paul telling us how God reaches the Gentile. Are we not to preach the gospel? Sure we are. But just realize it does not come by human effort, it comes by the testimony of God's Spirit, through creation, through God's people, if the person is interested in finding out who that God is.

Let's close with prayer.