

Why the gospel is needed

• *Although God loves the human race, He is angry with it*

• *He has a holy hatred of all sin*

• *Everyone knows that God is there!*

(i) *The reality of God is instinctive*

(ii) *God is revealing Himself*

(iii) *Creation*

(iv) *Instinctive knowledge of God rejected*

Where there is a refusal of God:

1. *The mind is darkened*

Paul has told the Roman Christians what his theme is: the power of God in the preaching of the gospel. Now Paul moves into his first major section, in which he is telling us why the gospel is needed for the entire human race.

Salvation is needed desperately. ¹⁸*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who hold down the truth in unrighteousness.* The fact is: God is angry with the human race. It is true that God loves the human race, for he loves what he created and the human race was created in the image of God. But God has become angry. God **is** love, but he **becomes** angry. God's anger is his holy hatred of all sin and his determination to punish it and remove it from his universe in one way or another (either by salvation or by extermination). Paul specially has in mind at this point in Romans people who know nothing of God's revelation to Israel about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even people who do not know God's revelation in Scripture are still the objects of God's anger, ¹⁹*because among them what is known regarding God is plain, for God revealed it to them.* Everyone knows that God is there! Even atheists have a sense of God in their hearts, a sense of right and wrong, even a sense of God's judgement. God is angry with sinners – even sinners who do not know about the Old Testament or what he promised to do for the world through Israel. The Romans know nothing of the God of the promises concerning Jesus. But they do have a sense of God upon their hearts ...

Firstly, all men and women know the reality of God. Paul is not referring to knowledge of the gospel, the knowledge that comes through Jesus' salvation. But there nevertheless is a knowledge of God that all people have. People have a sense that God is there but they suppress the truth in unrighteousness. You might say, 'I am an atheist' or 'I don't know whether there is a God.' If you face the instincts of your heart, you **do** know God is there. But you are suppressing what you know.

The second thing Paul says here is that back behind this knowledge is an act of God in which he is revealing himself.

Thirdly, it is creation which gives this sense of God. ²⁰*For God's invisible characteristics are being seen from the creation of the world, being understood through what has been made, that is both his eternal power and divine nature, so that they are without excuse.*

Fourthly, although people in this sense know God they do not bow down to him as the God that he is. ²¹*For although they knew God they did not glorify him . . .* One might think that because of this natural knowledge of God that comes to us, we would fall down and worship God for his generosity and kindness towards us. But no, despite this instinctive knowledge of God, men and women brush him out of their minds and out of their lives.

For the rest of this first chapter of Romans Paul unfolds the way in which the anger of God shows itself against this sin of men and women in rejecting what they know. There are five stages in what Paul says in Romans 1:21–23.

1. **Where there is a refusal of God the mind is darkened.** *For although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give thanks but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.* When people reject the light of God's reality, they fall into gross and chaotic darkness in the whole of their lives. They use the mind but in the things of God their reasonings get them nowhere. They may be clever scientifically and their technology may be marvellous. but where there is an

• *A man who rejects God is vulnerable to foolish ideas*

unwillingness to face the instincts of their hearts, then the mind and the heart become spiritually blind. The heart is the innermost aspect of the nature of humankind. It is something deeper than the mind. It is 'out of people's hearts' that come 'thoughts'¹. It is what makes people what they really are. But when a person rejects what he knows of God there comes down an inability to see spiritual things or think clearly about the great issues of life. When a man rejects what God is saying he is likely to accept the most foolish ideas. Better to stop fighting. God is there; we know it.

1 Mark 7:21

2. *Men and women fall into false religion*

2. **Where there is a refusal of God men and women fall into false religion.** ²²Although they were claiming to be wise they became fools ²³and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God into a likeness of an image of corruptible man and birds and four-legged animals and reptiles. This is part of the judgement of God upon humankind. We lapse into folly when we suppress what we know of God, 'professing to be wise they became fools'¹. The ancient world – and the modern world – 'exchanged the glory' of God for their own alternatives. God's glory is the outshining of his essentially invisible holy nature. God is spiritual, incorruptible, the living God who acts in power despite his being the invisible God. But they chose instead 'a likeness of an image of corruptible man and birds and four-legged animals and reptiles'. Their gods were man-made objects that had to be carried around. Their gods were 'without glory'², corruptible, in other words, gods that were more and more discovered to be useless and lifeless. But the ancient gods and the modern gods decay! Modern humankind think they have outgrown all of this but instead they fabricate ideologies of their own mind and worship them instead. But whether it be idols of the hands or idols of the mind, it makes no difference. Men and women suppress the glory of the invisible and immortal God, and in their stupidity make some little god of their own and worship it for a generation or so until it proves entirely useless. But our philosophies and ideologies are all fabrications of human ingenuity. They do no better than the ancient man who cut down a tree, worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman, decked a chunk of wood with silver and gold, fastened it on some wall so that it could not move – and then worshipped it! We have our modern equivalents. But actually they are part of the anger of God. When we reject the God of the Bible, our substitutes are total failures. It is the problem that grips the human race. Only the gospel provides any kind of remedy.

1 1:22

2 1:23

• *Alternative gods, both ancient and modern, are useless and lifeless*

• *Substitutes are total failures*

• *The gospel is the only remedy*



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