

Sin and Condemnation: The World's need to get right with God (38)

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[Romans 1:18-3:20](#)

(Continuation from 07/24/16)

A. God's Case Against All Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men: Why God Shows Wrath, [Romans 1:18-23](#)

(Romans 1:18-23) Introduction: the message of this passage is perfectly clear: why God reveals and executes wrath upon men.

1. **The subjects of God's wrath (v.18).**
2. **Men reject that “within” them—conscience and thoughts (v.19).**
3. **Men reject that “without” them—the signs of creation (v.20).**
4. **Men do not honor God nor give thanks (v.21).**
5. **Men become prideful and turn away from God (v.22-23).**

2. ([Romans 1:19](#)) God, Proof of— Mind— Conscience: God—the only living and true God—shows wrath because men reject that *within them*; that is, they reject their consciences and thoughts and reasoning's about God. (Cp. [Romans 2:15](#).)

Romans 1:19 (NASB)

¹⁹“Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.”

In [Romans 1:19-23](#), Paul gives four reasons why they and every person born except Jesus Christ, fully deserve to be under God's wrath.

Those reasons may be identified as **1) God's revelation, 2) man's rejection, 3) man's rationalization, and 4) man's religion.**

God's Revelation ([Romans 1:19-20](#))

First of all, God is justified in His wrath against sinners because of the revelation of Himself to all mankind. [Romans 1:18-2:16](#) pertains especially to Gentiles, who did not have the benefit of God's revealed Word as did Israel. Israel, of course, was doubly guilty, because she not only rejected God's natural, universal revelation of Himself in creation and conscience but even rejected His unique written revelation through Scripture.

The Gift of Revelation

[Romans 1:19 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁹“**Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.**”

Paul’s point here is that, even apart from His written revelation, **that which is known about God is evident within** even pagan Gentiles, **for God made it evident to them.** The Lord testifies through Paul that His outward, visible manifestation of Himself is universally known by man. It **is evident within them** as well as without them. *All* men have evidence of God, and what their physical senses can perceive of Him their inner senses can understand to some extent. The Philistines both saw and acknowledged God’s power, as did the Canaanites, the Egyptians, and every other people who have lived on earth. The rebels who built the tower of Babel both saw and acknowledged God’s greatness, as did the wicked inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. All men know something and understand something of the reality and the truth of God. They are responsible for a proper response to that revelation. Any wrong response is “**inexcusable.**”

Theologian Augustus Strong wrote, “The Scriptures... both assume and declare that the knowledge that God is, is universal ([Romans 1:19-21](#), [28](#), [32](#); [Romans 2:15](#)). God has inlaid the evidence of [that] fundamental truth in the very nature of man, so that nowhere is He without a witness” (*Systematic Theology* [Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson, 1979 reprint], p.68).

Unregenerate man has “no help and [is] without God in the world” ([Ephesians 2:12](#)), not because he has no knowledge of God but because he naturally rebels against the knowledge of God that he has. As Paul has already attested ([Romans 1:18](#)), sinful mankind naturally suppresses God’s truth with his own unrighteousness.

No one can find God on his own initiative or by his own wisdom or searching. Yet God has never left man to his own initiative and understanding but has graciously provided abundant evidence of Himself. He has sovereignly and universally **made** Himself **evident to** men. No person, therefore, can plead ignorance of God, because, entirely apart from Scripture, God has *always* revealed Himself and continues to reveal Himself to man. God is perfectly just and therefore could not rightly condemn those who are totally ignorant of Him. As Paul unequivocally asserts here, no person can rightly claim ignorance of God, and therefore no person can rightly claim that God’s wrath against him is unjust. Every person is accountable for the revelation of God that may lead one to salvation.

Tertullian, the prominent early church Father, said that it was not the pen of Moses that initiated the knowledge of the Creator. The vast majority of mankind, though they had never heard the name of Moses—to say nothing of his book—know the God of Moses nonetheless (cf. *An Answer to the Jews*, chap. 2).

A disease left **Helen Keller** as a very young girl without sight, hearing, and speech. Through **Anne Sullivan’s** tireless and selfless efforts, Helen finally learned to communicate through touch and even learned to talk. When Miss Sullivan first tried to tell Helen about

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God, the girl's response was that she already knew about Him—just didn't know His name (Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life* [New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1905], pp. 368-74).

That which is known could be rendered “that which is knowable.” Obviously, finite man cannot know everything about God even with the perfect revelation of Scripture. Paul's point is that **that which is** capable of being **known about God** apart from special revelation is indeed known by fallen mankind. The characteristics of God that are reflected in His creation give unmistakable testimony to Him.

While ministering in Lystra, Paul told his Gentile audience about the God “**who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them.**” He went on to explain that “**in the generations gone by [God] permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness**” ([Acts 14:15-17](#)). The very goodness of life testifies to the goodness of the God who provides it.

On his next journey Paul told the pagan philosophers on Mars Hill at Athens,
“**While I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.” What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist**” ([Acts 17:23-28 NASB](#)).

In other words, God controls the nations, their boundaries, and their destinies. He controls time, the seasons, and every other aspect both of heaven and earth. Even more remarkable than that, Paul says, because God has graciously chosen to make Himself known and approachable, “He is not far from each one of us.”

John speaks of Jesus Christ as “**the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man**” ([John 1:9 NASB](#)). He was not speaking about the saving knowledge of God, which comes only through faith, but of the intellectual knowledge of God, which comes to every human being through God's self-manifestation in His creation. Every person has a witness of God, and therefore every person is accountable to follow the opportunity to respond to Him in faith.

The Content of Revelation ([Romans 1:20](#))

Next Paul specifies the content of the revelation of Himself that God makes known to all mankind. **Since the creation of the world**, he declares, God has made His **invisible**

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attributes visible. The particular **attributes** that man can perceive in part through his natural senses are God's **eternal power and His divine nature**. God's **eternal power** refers to His never-failing omnipotence, which is reflected in the awesome creation which that **power** both brought into being and sustains. God's **divine nature** of kindness and graciousness is reflected, as Paul told the Lystrans, in the "**rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness**" ([Acts 14:17](#)).

The noted theologian **Charles Hodge** testified, "God therefore has never left himself without a witness. His existence and perfections have ever been so manifested that his rational creatures are bound to acknowledge and worship him as the true and only God" (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983 reprint], p. 37).

God's natural revelation of Himself is not obscure or selective, observable only by a few perceptive souls who are specially gifted. His revelation of Himself through creation can be **clearly seen** by everyone, **being understood through what has been made**.

Even in the most ancient of times, long before the telescope and microscope were invented, the greatness of God was evident both in the vastness and in the tiny intricacies of nature. Men could look at the stars and discover the fixed order of their orbits. They could observe a small seed reproduce itself into a giant tree, exactly like the one from which it came. They could see the marvelous cycles of the seasons, the rain, and the snow. They witnessed the marvel of human birth and the glory of the sunrise and sunset. Even without the special revelation David had, they could see that "**the heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands**" ([Psalm 19:1 NASB](#)).

Some birds are able to navigate by the stars. Even if hatched and raised in a windowless building, if shown an artificial sky, they immediately are able to orient themselves to the proper place to which to migrate. The archer fish is able to fire drops of water with amazing force and accuracy, knocking insects out of the air. The bombardier beetle separately produces two different chemicals, which, when released and combined, explode in the face of an enemy. Yet the explosion never occurs prematurely and never harms the beetle itself. No wonder David declared that "**power belongs to God**" ([Psalm 62:11](#)) and that **Asaph** ([Psalm 79:11](#)) and **Nahum** ([1:3](#)) spoke of the greatness of His power.

Robert Jastrow, an astrophysicist and director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, has said:

"Now we see how the astronomical evidence supports the biblical view of the origin of the world.... The essential elements in the astronomical and biblical accounts of Genesis are the same. Consider the enormousness of the problem: Science has proved that the universe exploded into being at a certain moment. It asks what cause produced this effect? Who or what put the matter and energy into the Universe? And science cannot answer these questions....

For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of

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theologians who have been there for centuries. (*God and the Astronomers* [New York: Norton, 1978], pp. 14, 114, 116)

With giant telescopes such as the 200 inch-diameter instrument at Mount Palomar in California astronomers can observe objects 4 billion light years away, a distance of more than 25 septillion miles! (**James Reid, *God, the Atom, and the Universe* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968].**)

At any given time, there are an average of 1,800 storms in operation in the world. The energy needed to generate those storms amounts to the incredible figure of 1,300,000,000 horsepower. By comparison, a large earth-moving machine has 420 horsepower and requires a hundred gallons of fuel a day to operate. Just one of those storms, producing a rain of four inches over an area of ten thousand square miles, would require energy equivalent to the burning of 640,000,000 tons of coal to evaporate enough water for such a rain. And to cool those vapors and collect them in clouds would take another 800,000,000 horsepower of refrigeration working night and day for a hundred days.

Agricultural studies have determined that the average farmer in Minnesota gets 407,510 gallons of rainwater per acre per year, free of charge, of course. The state of Missouri has some 70,000 square miles and averages 38 inches of rain a year. That amount of water is equal to a lake 250 miles long, 60 miles wide, and 22 feet deep.

The US. Natural Museum has determined that there are at least 10 million species of insects, including some 2,500 varieties of ants. There are about 5 billion birds in the United States, among which some species are able to fly 500 miles non-stop across the Gulf of Mexico. Mallard ducks can fly 60 miles an hour, eagles 100 miles an hour, and falcons can dive at speeds of 180 miles an hour.

The earth is 25,000 miles in circumference, weighs 6 septillion, 588 sextillion tons, and hangs unsupported in space. It spins at 1,000 miles per hour with absolute precision and careens through space around the sun at the speed of 1,000 miles per minute in an orbit 580 million miles long.

The head of a comet may be from 10,000 to 1,000,000 miles long, have a tail 100,000,000 miles long, and travel at a speed of 350 miles per second. If the sun's radiated energy could be converted into horsepower, it would be the equivalent of 500 million, million, billion horsepower. Each second it consumes some 4 million tons of matter. To travel at the speed of light (ca. 186,281 miles per second) across the Milky Way, the galaxy in which our solar system is located, would take 125,000 years. And our galaxy is but one of millions.

The human heart is about the size of its owner's fist. An adult heart weighs less than half a pound, yet can do enough work in twelve hours to lift 65 tons one inch off the ground. A water molecule is composed of only three atoms. But if all the molecules in one drop of water were the size of a grain of sand, they could make a road one-foot-thick and a half mile wide that would stretch from Los Angeles to New York. Amazingly, however, the atom itself is largely space, its actual matter taking up only one trillionth of its volume.

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Except to a mind willfully closed to the obvious, it is inconceivable that such power, intricacy and harmony could have developed by any means but that of a Master Designer who rules the universe. It would be infinitely more reasonable to think that the separate pieces of a watch could be shaken in a bag and eventually become a dependable timepiece than to think that the world could have evolved into its present state by blind chance.

Even a pagan should be able to discern with the psalmist that surely the One who made the ear and the eye is Himself able to hear and to see (see [Psalm 94:9](#)). If we can hear, then whoever made us surely must understand hearing and seeing. If we, His creatures, can think, then surely the mind of our Creator must be able to reason.

Men are judged and sent to hell not because they do not live up to the light evidenced in the universe but because ultimately that rejection leads them to reject Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit **“will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment,”** Jesus said; **“concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me”** ([John 16:8-9](#)). But if a person lives up to the light of the revelation he has, God will provide for his hearing the gospel by some means or another. In His sovereign, predetermined grace He reaches out to sinful mankind. **“As I live!”** declared the Lord through Ezekiel, **“I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live”** ([Ezekiel 33:11](#)). God does not desire **“for any to perish but for all to come to repentance”** ([2 Peter 3:9](#)). He will give His elect the privilege of hearing the gospel and will bring them to Himself. **“You will seek Me and find me,”** the Lord promised through Jeremiah, **“when you search for Me with all your heart”** ([Jeremiah 29:13](#)).

Because the Ethiopian eunuch was sincerely seeking God, the Holy Spirit sent Philip to witness to him. Upon hearing the gospel, he believed and was baptized ([Acts 8:26-39](#)). Because Cornelius, a Gentile centurion in the Roman army was **“a devout man, and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people, and prayed to God continually,”** God sent Peter to him to explain the gospel. **“While Peter was still speaking,... the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message,”** and they were **“baptized in the name of Jesus Christ”** ([Acts 10:2, 44, 48](#)). Because Lydia was a true worshiper of God, when she heard the gospel, **“the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul”** ([Acts 16:14](#)).

Man’s Rejection ([Romans 1:21](#))

God is also justified in His wrath and judgment because of man’s willful rejection of Him. Paul explicitly declares that **though they knew God** through this natural, general revelation, unbelieving men still rejected Him. Although man is innately conscious of God’s existence and power, he is just as innately and wickedly inclined to reject that knowledge. The natural tendency of unregenerate mankind is to **“proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived”** ([2 Timothy 3:13](#)). As Paul reminds believers, **“We also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy; hateful, hating one another”** ([Titus 3:3](#)).

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A certain evolutionist said, “I refuse to believe in God, so what other alternative do I have but evolution?” The man was honest, but he gave clear testimony to the fact that it was not evidence for evolution that led him to disbelief in God but rather his disbelief in God that led him to embrace evolution.

Donald Grey Barnhouse made this potent observation:

“Will God give man brains to see these things and will man then fail to exercise his will toward that God? The sorrowful answer is that both of these things are true. God will give a man brains to smelt iron and make a hammer head and nails. God will grow a tree and give man strength to cut it down and brains to fashion a hammer handle from its wood. And when man has the hammer and the nails, God will put out His hand and let man drive nails through it and place Him on a cross in the supreme demonstration that men are without excuse. (*Romans, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953], p. 245*)

In [verse 21](#), Paul mentions four ways in which men exhibit their rejection of God: by dishonoring Him, by being thankless to Him, by being futile in their speculations concerning Him, and by being darkened in their hearts about Him.

First, man fails to **honor** God **as God**. This is the basic expression of the root sin of pride which is at the core of man’s fallenness. *Doxazō* (**honor**) is probably better translated here as *glory*, as it is in numerous versions. The worst deed committed in the universe is failure to give God **honor**, or glory. Above everything else, God is to be glorified. To glorify God is to exalt Him, to recognize Him as supremely worthy of honor, and to acknowledge His divine attributes. Since the glory of God is also the sum of all the attributes of His being, of all He has revealed of Himself to man, to give God glory is to acknowledge His glory and extol it. We cannot give Him glory by adding to His perfection, but by praising His perfection. We glorify Him by praising His glory!

Scripture continually calls upon believers to glorify the Lord. David admonishes us: “Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to His name” ([Psalm 29:1-2](#)). “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do,” Paul says, “do all to the glory of God” ([1 Corinthians 10:31](#)). One day the twenty-four elders will fall down before Christ on His heavenly throne and declare, “Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created” ([Revelation 4:11](#)).

As the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* eloquently declares, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” Man was created to glorify God (see [Leviticus 10:3](#); [1 Chronicles 16:24-29](#); [Psalm 148](#); [Romans 15:5-6](#)), and for him to fail to give God glory is therefore the ultimate affront to his Creator.

After they were created in God’s own image, Adam and Eve continually experienced God’s presence and glory. They communed directly with Him and they praised Him and acknowledged His glory and honor. But when they sinned by disobeying God’s command and seeking to gain glory and honor for themselves, they “**hid themselves from the**

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presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden” ([Genesis 3:8](#)). Sin brought separation from God, and Adam and Eve no longer sought God’s presence or yearned to bring Him glory. Ever since that time, fallen man has sought to avoid God and to deny His glory and even His very existence.

Throughout Scripture, God has revealed many elements of His glory. When Moses asked to see God’s glory, the Lord manifested His *goodness, graciousness, and compassion*, saying, **“I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion”** ([Exodus 33:19](#)).

The Lord placed Moses in the cleft of the rock and covered him with His hand, lest he see His full glory and be consumed. He then allowed Moses to view Him partially from behind as He passed by. As God presented Himself before Moses, He also gave a litany of His divine attributes, declaring, **“The Lord, the Lord God, *compassionate and gracious, slow to anger; and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin*”** ([Exodus 33:20-34:7](#); emphasis added).

Although He had delivered them from bondage in Egypt and given them His holy law by which to live, the people persistently rebelled against God and against His appointed leader, Moses. Yet God continued to manifest His glory to His chosen people. After the Tabernacle was built, the Lord filled it with His glory as the sign of His divine presence with His people ([Exodus 40:34](#)). As Israel moved about in the wilderness for forty years, God manifested His presence and His glory through the pillar of cloud that guided them by day and the pillar of fire that reassured them by night ([vv. 36-38](#)).

After the Temple was built by Solomon, the cloud of the Lord’s glory filled the holy place there ([1 Kings 8:11](#)). Yet Israel continued to rebel against the Lord through countless kinds of false worship (see [Ezekiel 8:4-18](#)). When she persistently refused to turn from her sin, God’s glory eventually departed from the Temple ([Ezekiel 11:22-23](#)), and at that point the theocratic kingdom of Israel came to an end.

The glory of God did not return to earth until Messiah came. As the veiled incarnation of God’s glory, Jesus Christ manifested divine glory through His *grace and truth* ([John 1:14](#)). On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus presented Himself before Peter, James, and John in a unique manifestation of His royal *splendor* ([Matthew 17:2](#)). Paul pointed up the *power* of God’s glory when he declared that **“Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father,”** ([Romans 6:4](#)). In less dramatic but just as certain ways, Jesus was a living testimony to God’s glory through His miracles and through His *love, truth, mercy, kindness, and grace*.

The rest of the created world, however, has never revolted against God or sought to hide His glory as has man. As already cited, David exulted that **“the heavens are telling of the glory of God, and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands”** ([Psalm 19:1](#)).

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[Psalm 148](#) calls on the entire universe to proclaim God's glory. The animals do just what God has created them to do. The flowers bloom just as God designed them to, and the butterfly gently and beautifully flies from place to place, testifying to God's beauty and order.

But recognizing God's glorious attributes and acts and glorifying Him for them is precisely what fallen men do *not* do. Millions upon millions of people have lived in the midst of God's wonderful universe and yet proudly refused to recognize Him as its Creator and to affirm His majesty and glory. And for that willful, foolish rejection they are without excuse as they stand under God's righteous judgment. The person who can live in the midst of God's marvelous creation and yet refuse to recognize Him as its Creator and affirm His majesty and glory is a fool indeed.

Through Jeremiah, the Lord warned His people, **“Listen and give heed, do not be haughty, for the Lord has spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God, before He brings darkness and before your feet stumble on the dusky mountains, and while you are hoping for light He makes it into deep darkness, and turns it into gloom”** ([Jeremiah 13:15-16](#)). When King Herod proudly accepted the crowd's acclamation that he spoke **“with the voice of a god and not of a man,... immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory and he was eaten by worms and died”** ([Acts 12:22-23](#)).

When Christ returns to earth, **“the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken”** ([Matthew 24:29](#)). And at that moment, when all the natural lights of the universe are extinguished, the dazzling divine light of God's eternal glory in His Son will illumine the entire earth. **“Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory”** ([v. 30](#)).

Second, because man in his pride fails to honor and glorify God as Creator, he also fails to **give thanks** to Him for His gracious provision. His unbelief is made still worse by his ingratitude. Although God is the source of every good thing that men possess—giving rain, sun, and other natural blessings to the just and unjust alike (see [Matthew 5:45](#); [Acts 14:15-17](#))—the natural man fails to thank Him because he fails even to acknowledge His existence.

Third, as a consequence of their failing to honor and thank God, fallen men have become **futile in their speculations**. To reject God is to reject the greatest reality in the universe, the reality which gives the only true meaning, purpose, and understanding to everything else. Refusing to recognize God and to have His truth guide their minds, sinful men are doomed to **futile** quests for wisdom through various human **speculations** that lead only to falsehood and therefore to still greater unbelief and wickedness. The term **speculation** embraces all man's godless reasonings.

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To forsake God is to exchange truth for falsehood, meaning for hopelessness, and satisfaction for emptiness. But an empty mind and soul is like a vacuum. It will not long remain empty but will draw in falsehood and darkness to replace the truth and light it has rejected. The history of fallen mankind is devolutionary not evolutionary. The **foolish heart** that rejects and dishonors God does not become enlightened and freed, as sophisticated unbelievers like to claim, but rather becomes spiritually **darkened** and further enslaved to sin. The person who forsakes God forsakes truth, light, and eternal life, as well as meaning, purpose, and happiness. He also forsakes the foundation and motivation for moral righteousness.

Spiritual darkness and moral perversity are inseparable. When man forfeits God, he forfeits virtue. The godless philosophy of the world inescapably leads to moral perversion, because unbelief and immorality are inextricably intertwined. **“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception,”** Paul warned the Colossians, **“according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ”** ([Colossians 2:8](#)).

When the incarnation of truth and light came into the world, unbelieving mankind would not have Him. Because Jesus was the light of the world, they rejected Him, because their deeds were evil and they loved darkness rather than light ([John 3:19-20](#)). For the very reason that Jesus spoke the truth, they would not believe Him ([John 8:45](#)). That is the legacy of man’s refusal to glorify God.