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Series: The Book of Romans

# Sin and Condemnation: The World's need to get right with God (40)

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

(Continuation from 08/07/16)

## 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).**

### 3. **(Romans 1:20) God, Proof of— Creation— Man, Depravity: God—the only living and true God—shows wrath because men reject that *without* them—the signs of creation.**

**Romans 1:20 (NASB)**

**<sup>20</sup>“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”**

Creation reveals God. The whole universe, its presence and its nature, declares God.

However, note something often overlooked. Men can look at nature and see *more* than the simple fact that God is the great Creator. Men can see *more* than a Supreme Being behind the creation of the universe. They can see “**the invisible things**” of God.

This means at least two things.

1. Man can see the “*eternal power*,” the Supreme Intelligence and Force (or Energy), of God. Man can look at the creation of the earth and outer space, of plants and animals, of man and woman; he can look and clearly see their...

- 1) bodies and structure.
- 2) variety and beauty.
- 3) arrangement and order.

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- 4) purpose and laws.

When man looks at such things and reasons with an *honest spirit*, he sees clearly that the world was made by a Creator. But, as stated above, he sees much more.

He sees that the Creator is a God of supreme...

- 1) Life and Being
- 2) Intelligence and Knowledge
- 3) Energy and Power (the Supreme Force)
- 4) purpose and meaning
- 5) design and order (law)
- 6) beauty and majesty
- 7) glory and honor
- 8) value and worth (morality)
- 9) mystery (things not understood; secrets undiscovered)

2. Man can see the “*Godhead*,” that is, the deity of God. When he looks at nature and reasons with an *honest spirit*, he sees clearly that the Creator is a God who...

- 1) cares and provides for what He has created.
- 2) gives life and has interest in life.
- 3) regenerates, replenishes, and carries things on.
- 4) deserves worship and obedience (being the Creator of life and purpose, and being the Supreme Person of law and order demands that all his subjects serve and obey Him).

**Note what Scripture says:** man is without excuse. The point is shocking. Man has every evidence imaginable within creation directing him toward God, yet man rejects the knowledge of God within creation. This is the second reason why God reveals and shows His wrath. Man is without excuse. Man has no defense, no answer, no reason that can justify his rejection of God.

[Acts 14:17 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>17</sup>“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.”

[Romans 1:20 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>20</sup>“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”

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

<sup>1</sup>“The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.”

[Psalm 97:6 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>6</sup>“The heavens declare His righteousness, And all the peoples have seen His glory.”

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**4. (Romans 1:21) God, Sins Against— Unthankful— Dishonor, of God— Man, Depravity: God—the only living and true God—shows wrath because men do not honor God nor give Him thanks.**

**Romans 1:21 (NASB)**

**<sup>21</sup>“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”**

Note that Paul shifted to the past tense in this verse. He was speaking of what men had done in the past; and, of course, men still do the same today. Two serious charges are made against men.

Men can clearly know God both...

- 1) within themselves: in their own thoughts, reasoning's, consciences.
- 2) without themselves: in creation and nature, in the earth and outer space.

They can know that God gives them life and cares and provides for them, and that God runs everything in an orderly and lawful way, giving purpose and meaning to life. Men can see that God is great and good; therefore, God deserves to be glorified and given thanks.

But men...

- 1) did not glorify Him: did not worship, obey, or serve Him as God.
- 2) did not give thanks to Him: did not praise, magnify, or express appreciation to Him.

**Romans 1:21 (NASB)**

**<sup>21</sup>“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became **futile** in their **speculations**, and their foolish heart was darkened.”**

What happens when men reject God is tragic. **Two severe things** happen when they push God out of their minds.

1. Men's imaginations become vain.

- 1) ⇒ The word “speculations” (*dialogismois*) means “thoughts, reasoning's, deliberations, conclusions, speculations.”
- 2) ⇒ The word “futile” (*emataiōthēsan*) means, “empty, futile, unsuccessful, senseless, worthless.”

**Thought 1.** When men push God out of their minds, their minds are void and empty of God. God is not in their thoughts. (Cp. [Psalm 10:4](#).)

**Psalm 10:4 (NASB)**

**<sup>4</sup>“The wicked, in the haughtiness of his countenance, does not seek *Him*. All his thoughts are, “There is no God.”**

Their minds are ready to be *filled* with some other *god* or *supremacy*.

**Genesis 6:5 (NASB)**

<sup>5</sup>“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

**Psalms 10:4 (NASB)**

<sup>4</sup>“The wicked, in the haughtiness of his countenance, does not seek *Him*. All his thoughts are, “There is no God.”

**Psalms 94:11 (NASB)**

<sup>11</sup>“The LORD knows the thoughts of man, That they are a *mere* breath.”

**Proverbs 6:16-19 (NASB)**

<sup>16</sup>“There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him:

<sup>17</sup> Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood,

<sup>18</sup> A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil,

<sup>19</sup> A false witness *who* utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers.”

**Proverbs 15:26 (NASB)**

<sup>26</sup>“Evil plans are an abomination to the LORD, But pleasant words are pure.”

**Ezekiel 8:12 (NASB)**

<sup>12</sup>“Then He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images? For they say, 'The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.'”

**Romans 1:21 (NASB)**

<sup>21</sup>“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their **foolish heart was darkened.**”

2. Man’s “foolish heart was darkened.”

1) ⇒ The word “foolish” (*asunetos*) means “senseless, without understanding, unintelligent.”

2) ⇒ The word “darkened” (*eskotisthē*) means “blinded, unable to see.”

**Psalms 82:5 (NASB)**

<sup>5</sup>“They do not know nor do they understand; They walk about in darkness; All the foundations of the earth are shaken.”

**Proverbs 2:13 (NASB)**

<sup>13</sup>“From those who leave the paths of uprightness To walk in the ways of darkness.”

**Proverbs 4:19 (NASB)**

<sup>19</sup>“The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know over what they stumble.”

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**Acts 28:27 (NASB)**

<sup>27</sup> “FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES; OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.”

**2 Corinthians 4:4 (NASB)**

<sup>4</sup> “In whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

**Ephesians 4:18 (NASB)**

<sup>18</sup> “Being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart.”

**2 Timothy 3:7 (NASB)**

<sup>7</sup> “Always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Note a critical point. Men suffer empty imaginations and darkened hearts because they...

- 1) do not glorify God.
- 2) do not offer thanks to God.

This is the third reason why God reveals and shows wrath toward men.

**Matthew 7:26-27 (NASB)**

<sup>26</sup> “Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

<sup>27</sup> The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

**James 4:17 (NASB)**

<sup>17</sup> “Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

## II. THE DENIAL & DARKNESS—[Romans 1:21](#)

Man’s steps of depravity are recorded in this chapter. His first indictment in God’s courtroom is his *ingratitude*. He doesn’t want to know God, honor God, or thank God. His imaginations are **vain** which means “**futile, without result or success. It does not measure up to that which should be.**”

A classic example of man’s foolishness is seen in the *Times of London*. They reported that fourteen church study groups in Woodford looked at Old Testament psalms and concluded that 84 of the psalms were not fit for Christians to sing because these psalms spoke of wrath and judgment instead of love and grace. Wrath and judgment are divine attributes as well as love and grace. Eliminating God’s hatred for sin and His judgment upon sinners will not change the fact that one day, we will stand before the Lord in judgment. Rejecting God’s Word will not solve your problems.

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Many years ago, while on a visit to America, a wealthy Chinese businessman was fascinated by a powerful microscope. Looking through its lens to study crystals and the petals of flowers, he was amazed at their beauty and detail. So he decided to purchase one of these devices and take it back to China. He thoroughly enjoyed using it until one day he examined some rice he was planning to eat for dinner. Much to his dismay, he discovered that tiny living creatures were crawling in it. Since he was especially fond of this staple food in his daily diet, he wondered what to do. Finally, he concluded that there was only one way out of his dilemma —he would destroy the instrument that caused him to discover the distasteful fact! So he smashed the microscope to pieces. “How foolish!” you say. But many people do the same thing with the Word of God. They hate it and would like to get rid of it because it reveals their evil nature.

If you did something for someone and they responded with ungratefulness, then you can understand God’s judgment upon those who are ungrateful to Him and for what His son, Jesus Christ, has done on the cross for us. God says man’s foolish heart was **“darkened.”** When men and women purposely reject truth that has been given or revealed to them, their hearts tend to get harder, colder, and numb toward God. When you dethrone the Lord in your life, you become irreligious and irrational. If you leave God out of your reasoning, your conclusions will be wrong. The love that men have for their sin leads them to reject what is right and true. People reject Christ because they love their sin too much.

**John 3:19 (NASB)**

**<sup>19</sup>“This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.”**

**Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful ([v. 21](#)).**

A well-known Dutch philosopher and theologian said about this text that although God has objectively revealed himself to the human race, this general revelation yields no natural theology; that is, the revelation does not penetrate man’s consciousness. Those who hold to this view cite Calvin, who saw nature as a glorious theater that man cannot see because of his fallen condition. I think it is unfortunate that Calvin, the great Reformer, used that metaphor, because it was not consistent with everything else he taught about our response to general revelation.

To the Corinthians Paul writes that natural man does not know God, yet here in [Romans 1](#) he says the natural man does know God. How are we to reconcile that apparent contradiction? I think the reconciliation is found in the language itself. The Greek word *gnosko* means **“to know,”** but it can mean **“to know intellectually,”** by *cognition* (the Latin term), or **“to know intimately,”** as seen in [Genesis 4:1](#): **“Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived.”**

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**Genesis 4:1 (KJV)**

**<sup>1</sup>“And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.”**

**Genesis 4:1 (AMP)**

**<sup>1</sup>“AND ADAM knew Eve as his wife, and she became pregnant and bore Cain; and she said, I have gotten *and* gained a man with the help of the Lord.”**

**Genesis 4:1 (NASB)**

**<sup>1</sup>“Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, “I have gotten a manchild with *the help of the LORD.*”**

The word here denotes an intimate knowledge, one the Bible uses to refer to those who, born of the Spirit, are born unto this intimate, salvific, personal knowledge of God that only the redeemed have.

When Paul writes to the Corinthians about the Spirit, who gives that kind of knowledge, he says that the natural man does not know God in that sense ([2 Corinthians 2:14](#)).

**2 Corinthians 2:14 (NASB)**

**<sup>14</sup>“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.”**

Here in Romans he says that man’s problem is not that the knowledge fails to get through in the sense of a cognitive awareness of the reality of God. God is angry because that knowledge does get through. It is what we do with the knowledge that provokes the wrath of God. Knowing God, we refuse to honor Him as God; neither are we grateful.

The most fundamental sin in our fallen, corrupt nature is the sin of idolatry, the sin of refusing to honor God as He is. We want to strip Him of His attributes, turn Him into a God made in our image, a God we can live with, a God that we can be comfortable with. People say God is a God of love, not a God of wrath, but that is not the God of Scripture.

The God of love revealed in Scripture is also angry with sin. He is the God of justice, righteousness, and holiness. We cannot embrace the attributes of God that make us comfortable and reject the rest. When we do that, we join the throng of humanity that suppresses the truth of God and refuses to honor Him as God or be thankful. The refusal to honor and worship God, and hearts that are not filled with joy and gratitude for what He gives, are what define our fallenness. There are few people who delight in the worship of God.

Typically each Sunday afternoon I go out to lunch, and inevitably, after I have ordered my food, someone from our congregation sits at the table across from me, and we chat over lunch. During one such lunch I was asked, “Pastor, what do you think about all the people that are in here eating? They are not going to church.”

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“I know,” I replied. “People are everywhere but at church, because nothing is more displeasing to them than to worship God. They do not want to hear about God. That knowledge is suppressed. It is pushed down, and they have no desire to have God in their minds.”

## Darkened Hearts

Because men refused to glorify God as God, they **became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened** ([v. 21](#)). Some of the most brilliant people come to very different conclusions about the nature of reality. Who was more brilliant than **Thomas Aquinas** or **Aurelius Augustine**? They were fiercely convinced of the reality of God, and their lives were driven by that conviction, which lay at the foundation of everything else they believed.

Others of gifted intellect, such as **Jean-Paul Sartre**, **John Stuart Mill**, and **Albert Camus**, wound up on the other end of the spectrum, embracing nihilism à la Nietzsche, saying that there is no meaning or significance in human experience. How can such brilliant people end up so far away? If, at the very beginning of the pursuit of knowledge, people categorically deny what they know to be true—the reality of God—then, frankly, the farther away they will go from God. They have built their house on a lie so that their thinking becomes an exercise in futility, and their foolish hearts are darkened.

When Paul speaks of hearts that are dark, he uses the word *foolish*. To the Jew, the judgment of “**foolish**” is not an intellectual judgment; it is a moral judgment.

That is why Jesus warned against calling people fools ([Matthew 5:22](#)).

[Matthew 5:22 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>22</sup>“**But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.**”

Don’t say, “**The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’**” ([Psalm 14:1](#)).

[Psalm 14:1 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>1</sup>“**The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good.**”

The fool is not only being stupid; he is also being wicked because he is denying what he knows to be true. The indictment on all people is this: they refuse to honor God as God. It is not that they fail to know God and therefore do not honor or thank Him. They do know God but will not honor Him or be grateful. That is the massive perdition in which we find ourselves as fallen human beings, and against that background the gospel comes.