"NO EXCUSE!"

ROMANS 1:17-23
10-13-2019

INTRODUCTION: V. 17

***There is no excuse for unbelief!**

I. At the Judgment, No One Will be Able to Say:
I DID NOT HAVE THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD (v. 18)
(". . . hold the truth in unrighteousness")

A. How does an unbeliever hold down truth about God?

B. Why does an unbeliever hold down truth about God?

II. At the Judgment, No One Will be Able to Say:
I COULD NOT SEE THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD (v. 19-20)
("manifest . . . shewed . . . clearly seen . . .")

A. Creation shows God's might ("eternal power")

B. Creation shows God's majesty ("Godhead")

III. At the Judgment, No One Will be Able to Say:
I DID NOT KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD (v. 21-23)
(". . . when they knew God . . .")

A. The unbeliever rejects what he knows to be true (v. 21a)

B. The unbeliever is judged for what he knew to be true (v. 21b-22)

C. The unbeliever substitutes for what he knew to be true (v. 23)

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Verse 17 is the thesis statement (theme) of the book of Romans.

From this proposition, Paul unfolds the righteousness of God (justification) in the rest of the epistle.

I. The Need of God's Righteousness (chaps. 1-3)
(Sin of All Men)

II. The Source of God's Righteousness (chaps. 4-5)
(Salvation by Grace)

III. The Results of God's Righteousness (chaps. 6-8)
(Sanctification of the Believer)

IV. The Defense of God's Righteousness (chaps. 9-11)
(Sovereignty of God)

V. The Application of God's Righteousness (chaps. 12-16)
(Service of Believers)

Today, we will examine Paul's introduction to the need of God's righteousness. Man needs to believe the Gospel to have God's righteousness.

There are 2 basic types of people in the world:

1) Those who believe
2) Those who do not believe

1) Those who have faith in God
2) Those who do not have faith in Him

1) Those who want the truth
2) Those who do not want the truth

God's righteousness is unveiled before our eyes in the Gospel.

1) His righteous demands for sin;
2) His righteous atoning sacrifice of His son; and
3) the righteousness that he imputes to the sinner upon belief . . . All are elements of the Gospel (SEE Rom. 3:21-26).

The wonderful blessings of the Gospel are only visible to the spiritual eyes of those who believe!

From (ek) faith **to** (eis) faith = Out of (because of) initial faith, your eyes are opened to God's righteousness; into a life of faith: as it is written, "the Just (righteous) will [future tense] live by (ek - because of) his faith."

The key to understanding the Gospel is faith in it!

The key to having the Gospel save your soul is faith in it!

God cannot teach you anything if you refuse to believe. God's Word cannot change your life if you refuse to believe.

Faith is not just something we exercised at one point in our life (at salvation) and then didn't need it anymore.

We are to live by faith. Our whole life is to be characterized as a life of faith.

"as it is written" - a quote of the OT - Habakkuk 2:4 - Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but **the just shall live by his faith**.

"The just shall (will) live . . ."

What type of life is meant?

2 types –
1) Eternal life (future salvation)
2) Abundant life (present sanctification)

Proof: The phrase "From faith" (points to salvation)
The phrase "To faith" (Points to sanctification)

Two other times the phrase "The just shall live by faith" appears in the N.T.

In Gal. 3:11, Paul uses it to point to salvation by faith; and in Hebrews 10:38 to a life of faith

Gal. 3:11 - "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith."

Heb. 10:38 - "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

The emphasis in	Romans 1:17 is on	"the just"
	Galatians 3:11 -	"shall live"
	Hebrews 10:38 –	"by faith"

In other words, <u>from</u> initial faith (at salvation) <u>into</u> a growing faith (sanctification) throughout one's life, a believer becomes more and more aware of God's blessed righteousness which is brought to open view in the Gospel.

***There is no excuse for unbelief!**

I. At the Judgment, No One Will be Able to Say:
I DID NOT <u>HAVE</u> THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD (v. 18)
(". . . hold the truth in unrighteousness")

Note the contrast between verses 17 & 18:

* The revealed <u>righteousness</u> of God (v. 17)
*The revealed <u>wrath</u> of God (v. 18)

*The <u>faith</u> of a righteous [just] man
*The <u>unbelief</u> of an unrighteous man

The wrath (deep-seated anger) of God <u>is</u> (present tense) revealed against the <u>sin</u> of men.

"Hold the truth" = hold down; suppress. They hold the truth down (they drown it).

Whenever there is a rejection of God's truth, there will be ungodliness and unrighteousness (prov. 29:18). (EX: how America has gone down-hill since the teaching of evolution took over the public schools).

Unbelief and sin go hand in hand; just like belief (faith) and righteous living go hand in hand.

A. How does an unbeliever hold down truth about God?

1. They refuse to think about it (Ps. 10:4 - "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.").

2. They refuse to talk about it (remember, to ignore a fact does not alter the fact) (EX: how those in sin scatter when some godly Christian enters the room).

3. They refuse to listen to it (they have turned a deaf ear to God - "seeing [they] see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand . . ." - Mt. 13:13).

4. They refuse to obey it (Some may listen to it or talk about it out of curiosity, but do not submit themselves to it).

To them, the wrath of God is revealed.

Eph. 5:6 - "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."

Col. 3:6 - "For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience."

B. Why does an unbeliever hold down truth about God?

**They hold it down (ignore it; cover it, etc.) so that they can live "in unrighteousness"

Truth is light, and light exposes sin (SEE John 3:19-21).

What is man afraid of, that he holds off the truth?
He is afraid of losing that which he loves most (his own self; his own independence; that which pleases him).

Why are people content with the theory of evolution? They love their sin; they don't want to acknowledge a Creator because if He existed they would have to bow their knee to Him in submission, and they don't want this.

--they don't want to be told how to live.
--they don't like authority (especially not God's)

Willful unbelief because of a love for selfish sin is man's way of saying, "Leave me alone, God, I don't want You in my life." Hell is God's way of saying, "Okay, you may have your wish."

For believers, this principle also applies.

The old saying, "This Book will keep you from sin, and sin will keep you from this Book" is true!

The real reason (whether or not you are aware of it) that you don't read your Bible is because of sin (not that you don't have time).

II. At the Judgment, No One Will be Able to Say:
I COULD NOT SEE THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD (v. 19-20)
("manifest . . . shewed . . . clearly seen . . .")

V. 19

"Known of God" = knowable about God.

We can know about God through general revelation, but we cannot know Him (we need special revelation to know God).

"Is manifest" = it is clear (in their consciences).

No one can say truth about God's existence is foggy.

The problem with an agnostic is not that he cannot know there is a God, but that he will not accept it.

There are no real atheists in the world. An atheist says "There is no God."

1. That statement cannot be proven.
2. All the evidence proves just the opposite.
3. You may say, "God is not for me," but you can't say "There is no God" – because you know He is! If you have eyes, you have seen evidence of God. "God hath shewed it unto" you.

A. Creation shows God's might *("eternal power")*

Nature points to the eternal ability of God. (it shows God to be sufficient to do all things).

Creation shows God to be innumerable times more powerful than man.

The One who is strength can give strength! This is Isaiah's point -

SEE Is. 40:12-15, 22, 26-31

A.J. Hoover said: "The choice is simple: One chooses either a self-existent God or a self-existent universe - and the universe is not behaving as if it is self-existent."

(The Law of Thermal Dynamics would support I Jn. 2:17, which states that

the "world is passing away." The earth does not improve with time but deteriorates.)

B. Creation shows God's majesty *("Godhead")*

Nature points to the divine nature of God (it shows God to be worthy of worship).

Cp. Paul's apologetic to the philosophers at Mars Hill (Acts 17:22-31).

V. 20

The visible creation points to an unseen Creator.

ILLUS: a watch points to a watch-maker.

I never saw the person who made this watch, but I know he exists. (I would be a fool to deny this -- "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" - Ps. 14:1).

I never met the person who made this watch, but I know something about him.

--This watch points to intelligence (it has order)
--This watch points to artistic ability (it has design)
--This watch points to a purposeful mind (it has a function)

For those who would say, "If God exists, why doesn't He shows us in some tangible way that He is there?" - I would respond: "what more tangible proof do you want than the ground you walk on; than the body you have; than the majestic mountains, or the mysterious ocean? What more tangible evidence do you need than the vastness of the universe; or the minuteness of an atom?"

"We could address the logical improbability that life began without an outside stimulus, no matter how much time scientists postulate for such an occurrence. We could speak of the intricate pattern of the movement of the bodies in the universe - including amazing, pinpoint timing of their courses in relation to one another. We could talk about the precise tilt of the earth, its exact distance from the sun, and its accurate journey through our solar system - all prerequisites for the temperate climate we enjoy." (DeHaan, Crucial Questions series, "God: His Existence" Radio Bible Class, Grand Rapids, 1987, p. 9).

III. At the Judgment, No One Will be Able to Say: I DID NOT KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD (v. 21-23)

(". . . when they knew God . . .")

A. The unbeliever rejects what he knows to be true (v. 21a)

V. 21

"When they knew God..." - The word "knew" (ginosko) suggests a recognition or an awareness about something. It points to a progressive understanding (or a knowledge which grows), rather than a fullness of knowledge (oida) or a direct knowledge (epiginosko)

From creation we do not know God personally, but we know what God is like.

No one is born an agnostic.

You convinced yourself at some point in your life that God's existence was not provable.

You did know about God. But because of pride or selfishness, you did not give Him glory or thanks for what He has done.

Two proper responses to creation should be:

1) Glorifying God (giving Him the honor, respect and praise due Him)

2) Thanking God (expressing appreciation for what He has done for you)

B. The unbeliever is judged for what he knew to be true (v. 21b-22)

God judges those who knew the truth but rejected it.

The verbs "became vain," "darkened," "became fools" are all passive, which means God made them vain, God darkened their hearts, God made them foolish.

Why would God do this? Because they first rejected Him (v. 21a).

Remember Pharaoh - The Bible says that "Pharaoh hardened his heart" (Ex. 8:32). From that point on "The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh" (Ex. 9:12)

When we know truth (from God) and do not believe it and act upon it, God will take it away!

Luke 8:18 - "Take heed therefore how ye hear; for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have." CP. Mt. 25:14-30).

EX: how Jesus spoke in parables because they did not accept His Word when spoken plainly. SEE Mt. 13:12-16.

"Vain in their imaginations" = worthless in their ability to reason (rationalize).

"Foolish heart was darkened" = their undiscerning (without insight) heart was darkened (blinded).

"They became fools" = they were caused to become morons.

Whenever unregenerate man rebels against light, God removes it.

The answer to reaching "atheists" and "agnostics" for Christ is not by arguing to prove the existence of God. They already know He exists. However, they have hardened their hearts, and consequently God has also hardened them.

Therefore, the only answer is prayer!

They are under the wrath of God. They are presently under His judgment.

It is a serious thing to rebel against truth!

You call for the judgment of God when you do.

Cp. v. 24 -"God also gave them up to uncleanness."
v. 26 -"God gave them up to vile affections"
v. 28 -"God gave them over to a reprobate mind."

C. The unbeliever substitutes for what he knew to be true (v. 23)

The heavens declare God's glory.

Psalms 19:1-4 - The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world…

Creation speaks about God's glory and ability -

1) Creation speaks continually (v. 2)
2) Creation speaks in every language (v. 3)
3) Creation speaks at all places (v. 4)

Because God has revealed His glory in the physical universe, it has always been the tendency of depraved mankind to "worship the creature rather than the Creator."

Always remember: Nature declares (manifests) God's glory (Ps. 19:1); it is not His glory.

"Changed" = lit. exchanged. They substituted truth for a lie; reality for a copy (image).

(Those who reject God always find a substitute. It's idolatry, however it manifests itself or whatever form it takes - EX: materialism, humanism.)

NOTE: the progression of unbelief:

1. v. 22 - willful ignorance
2. v. 23 - idolatry
3. v. 24 - immorality

CONCLUSION:

What will God condemn sinners for? What is the only unforgivable sin? --Unbelief.

God saves us when we place our FAITH in Him!

- Faith in a Creator-God
    - Heb. 11:3 - "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."
- Faith in the Gospel of God (Romans 1:16, 17)
- Faith in the God of the Gospel (Romans 10:9,13)