

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Suppressing the Truth

by Dan Trygg

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all irreverence and unrighteousness of people, the ones suppressing the truth in unrighteousness,¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, are being perceived, being seen according to the things He has been made, so that they are without excuse.²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their reasonings, and their unperceptive heart was darkened.”

Rom. 1:18-21

Last time, we saw that *the righteousness of God was revealed through the gospel*, ...a righteousness which God offers to us as a gift, ...a righteousness that both covers us and can also fill us. We said that the gospel was the good news that God has reached down to us through Jesus to bring about the forgiveness of sins through His death on the cross, and to offer us a new life in Him. This message is able to bring new hope, new life and the power to change to those who believe it and lay hold of it by faith. The *message itself* does not change us, but our *trust* in God’s promise *enables Him to work in our lives* to begin a powerful transformation.

In today’s study, Paul tells us the reason *why the gospel hope and message is so important*. The apostle moves on to explain to us *the backdrop to the gospel hope: the dark and desperate condition of humanity*.

The first words from Paul’s pen are, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven...” We may not like to hear that. It may chafe against our sensibilities, but we need to be reminded of the nature of our existence (Eph. 2:3). **We are not alone in the universe. According to the Bible, we have been created by God, and we are answerable to Him.** He has made us, and placed us here on this planet to be *His stewards*. From creation, *there have always been expectations from God*. He gave us a charge and a responsibility to fill the earth and bring it under order, to rule over it, to work it (lit, “serve it”) and to preserve it (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15). **It is His earth, His creation, and He expects us to treat it with respect, in accordance with His wishes and design. This is not negotiable.** It does not matter if we voluntarily choose to believe in Him, or not. In the end, He *will* hold us accountable and judge us for what we have done while we were here (Rev. 20:11-15; II Cor. 5:10; Act 17:30,31). **Furthermore, He expects us to acknowledge Him, and be grateful for the blessings He has given to us.** He expects us to *live with Him in mind*, so that all that we do would agree with His interests, values and purposes. When we do so, He is pleased. **When we disregard Him and abuse what He has created,** He experiences the same kind of feeling we do when people do not respect us and misuse our property. **He becomes angry.** The anger He feels is akin to our own, for we are made in His image, and emotion is part of that God-like-ness. His anger is described by the Greek word, *orgē*. **This type of anger refers to “the swelling of a natural impulse to right what is wrong, to avenge evil, or to confront abuse and injustice.”** It results in a mental bent toward action. It is more of a “slow burn”, rather than an explosion, but the point is that **our choices to sin and dishonor Him offends Him. He becomes increasingly inclined to address that disrespect** in some way.

In light of this description of *orgē*, it is interesting to note the issues described in the next verses. Paul says that **God’s wrath is against all irreverence** (disregard of Him; lit., “un-devotedness”) **and un-right-eousness** (improper use of what is from God, or unjust actions toward others) **of people**, that is, of those who *suppress the truth* in or by their unjust or unrighteous motives and actions. He goes on to say that **this is intentional. At some level, everyone knows there is a God, and they know what He generally expects.** They *know* what is right, but *choose to do* what is wrong.

The things of God are evident, or are made visible, through the created things He has made. Even His eternal power and deity are *discerned, clearly seen* through creation, so that **no one has an excuse**. Theologians call this “general revelation”: God has clearly revealed Himself through what He has made. **Since people experientially-know something of God, they are accountable for that awareness.** The power, order, design and beauty of nature is a testimony to God (Psa. 19:1-6), and the bounty of His provision is meant to cause people to know of His goodness (Acts 14:17; I Tim. 4:4,5). There is even a longing, an emptiness, within the human heart that makes us aware that there is more than this life alone, and motivates people to seek after God (Ecc. 3:11; Acts 17:22-29).

As I mentioned, **the proper response to this inner knowledge of God’s existence is to honor Him and give Him thanks.** As Creator, *He* is the Key to unlocking the mysteries of life, the longings of the human heart. He is the Cornerstone of truth, from which all reality emanates and is ordered. **When people choose to disregard Him, a process of spiritual desensitization and moral degeneration begins to develop** (vss. 21-32). Without God as their focus, people become confused and disoriented. Their hearts become darkened (Eph. 4:17-19). Like the serpent’s ploy in the garden, ...in their attempt to *make themselves wise*, those who disregard God *become fools* (Gen. 3). Their

reasonings about life become empty and futile. **Without God as the key, people are unable to put the pieces of the puzzle of life together** (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). Their speculations and explanations of reality become foolish and misguided.

Historically, what happened in most cultures was that people gave up acknowledging the glory of the invisible, incorruptible God, and began to focus on all sorts of lesser demi-gods and imagined deities in the likeness of animals or people. Idolatry was born. Idolatry is descriptive of not just the worship of graven images, but also the inordinate veneration of politicians, military heroes, sports figures, movie stars, musicians or other obsessions from this world. The point is that these **people exchanged worship of God for the exaltation of natural things or people.**

When people turn from God to exalting themselves and their own wisdom, God will give them over to their wanderings. (1.) The first level of such self-focus is sensuality. Instead of focusing outward toward God as their Source of life, *their focus turns inward*. They become *more aware* of their inner feelings and desires, and **turn toward fulfilling these sensual desires**. The lusts of their hearts lead them into behaviors that are judged by God to be unclean or sinful. Furthermore, **they dishonor or devalue their bodies by attempting to fulfill their lusts in ways that are inappropriate** (vs. 24). For example, wanting to be loved and sexually gratified, they do not *honor* their bodies by reserving them for a covenant partner in marriage. Rather, *they give themselves away* to another in lust, and in so doing they *devalue* and *dishonor* the precious gift that the sexual relationship was meant to be, cheapening *it* and *themselves*. Promiscuity also exposes them to the possibility of disease, which can be hugely damaging to their *bodies*. Or, they may choose to gratify the sensual desires of taste and eating, and destroy their health by over-indulgence. They become fat and their *bodies* pay the price for their sin. Drunkenness is a further extension of this same principle. People drink to excess to alter their mood. In so doing, their inhibitions and judgment becomes impaired. They tend to do things that they would never do when sober, thus dishonoring *themselves*, and endangering their *physical health and safety* by what they introduce into their bodies, and by the consequences that often follow. **These are all natural avenues of sensual pleasure, which are removed from safe, healthy boundaries. They become an unhealthy focus in the person's life,** as they attempt to fulfill the emptiness they feel inside, which only God can satisfy (Eph. 4:17-19).

As they continue down this road of seeking and serving their sensual pleasure, and disregarding God, **another step in the desensitization process, and the moral degeneration that accompanies that, is that (2.) people begin to explore in areas that are unnatural and even more dishonorable.** God gives them over to their unseemly passions. Notice that **they are driven by a stronger lust**, and they are drawn to do something which is contrary to nature (vs. 26). **They abandon the way their bodies were obviously designed to be fulfilled, and dishonor themselves even further by pursuing pleasure in ways that God never intended.**

The example Paul used here is that of homosexual behavior. It is not politically acceptable in our culture to challenge the appropriateness of this so-called “alternative lifestyle”, but the Bible is quite clear. **God did not make men to be with men, nor women to be with women** (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10). **This is very evident, just from a cursory natural examination.** If you take their clothes off, and if you understand how things work, what is designed to go where in order for the race to continue? Tab A fits into slot B. Tab A is designed to deliver sperm to slot B, which is designed to receive it so that fertilization can take place. It does not take a genius to understand how things are *supposed* to work. For example, those who would argue that tab A could also fit into slot C are faced with the obvious problem that slot C does not come equipped with natural lubrication, where slot B does. Furthermore, fertilization cannot take place in that fashion. Slot B with another slot B will never produce offspring naturally, either. **The natural, normal function is quite clear. Does that mean pleasure or affection cannot be found in these other relationships? No, not at all.** There would be no issue if pleasure or affection could not happen between people of the same sex. People would not be drawn into those relationships, if pleasure and affection could not be found there. The Bible clearly says that they “burn in their desire toward one another” (vs. 27). (Does having strong feelings mean that they are *right* or appropriate, or that I should *act* on them? Of course not! Then there would be no moral boundaries at all! We would all be like animals.) Paul’s argument, however, is that God did not design things this way, and **to pursue inappropriate affection and pleasure in same-sex relationships is to misuse and misdirect what God intended to be used in a healthier venue.** It is to hijack and misappropriate what God meant to be used in *His* design for humanity, and to use it in ways contrary to *His* purposes. In doing this, are we *honoring* the Creator, or *dishonoring* Him?

Although homosexuality is the illustration Paul used here, I wonder if other unnatural means of pursuing pleasure would also fit in here. **The use of hard core drugs would seem to be a similar thing.** The use of an *unnatural substance* in order get pleasure also seems to be a deeper step into darkness and bondage.

Those who dishonor God, and disregard how He has made us, will receive a corresponding consequence in themselves (vs. 27 -- Not just their *bodies*.). **This is more than physical; it is emotional and spiritual.**

A final step in the degeneration of those who do not acknowledge God is (3.) a depraved mind (vss. 28-32). **These people have come to call evil good, and good evil** (Isa. 5:20), and actually *encourage* others to *pursue sin*.