

# "Life Without God" - Romans 1:18-32

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. *The Test*

1. Ads have recently begun appearing on TV and radio advertising confidential HIV tests
  - a. you buy the kit in the store
  - b. prick your finger to draw out a drop of blood
  - c. place it in a small sample container
  - d. then send it back to the lab
  - e. a couple weeks later, you call, give your secret code, and they tell you the results
2. People take this test because they want to know if they have contracted the HIV virus
3. They want to know so that if they are HIV positive, they can make some changes in their lifestyle, and most importantly, start seeking out treatment, such as it is
4. A correct *diagnosis* is always essential to getting the right *treatment*
5. What's true of HIV is also true of man's spiritual condition

### B. *A Picture*

1. While AIDS is a horrifying disease and those who are smitten with it need compassion and care
2. It provides us a look into a deeper dimension of life—because in many ways, AIDS parallels a *spiritual* epidemic from which all humankind is dying
3. There are countless millions today who are free of the HIV virus and who will never contract AIDS who are smitten with an even worse disease—it's a sort of spiritual AIDS
4. It is caused by the spiritual virus of *deception*
5. And its result is the gradual destruction of a person's ability to discern right from wrong, truth from error, life from death
6. If left untreated, there simply is not hope
7. But unlike AIDS, there *is* a cure for this spiritual epidemic of deception and death
8. It's the gospel of Jesus Christ

### C. *Paul's Method*

1. Like a skillful medical researcher and doctor,
2. Paul's method in Romans is to first *diagnose* the human condition before he proscribes the treatment
3. So he spends most of chapters 1, 2, and 3 describing *man apart from God*
4. What we read here is painful and troubling
5. But if we're honest, we have to admit that it is a crystal clear picture of the

- world around us
6. We are living in the middle of what Paul describes as "Life Without God"

## II. TEXT

### A. V. 18-19

**{18} For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,**  
**{19} because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them.**

1. As we saw last week, the word "gospel" means "good news"
2. But a person can only see the message of Christ was good news if they first see the options
  - a. it's only good news if they understand the bad news
  - b. they will only appreciate what Jesus has done for them if they understand where they are headed without Him
3. What point is there in calling Jesus "Savior" if I do not know what I am saved from?
4. Why should I care that He died for me if I have no awareness of my need?
5. Paul understands this, so he begins by showing his readers that not only is God a God of love and righteousness; He is also a God of wrath
6. The idea of a God of wrath makes people uncomfortable
  - a. so they cast it off as an old fashioned, unenlightened idea
  - b. modern liberal theology says it's time we jettisoned the idea of the wrath of God because it offends the sensibilities of most people
7. But if God is *righteous*, then He must also be *angry* at sin
  - a. that is precisely what the Bible teaches
  - b. (Psa 45:7) "**You love righteousness and hate wickedness.**"
  - c. if God is perfect in all His ways, then just as His love is perfect, so also is His hatred
    - He loves men & women perfectly
    - so He must hate what harms them perfectly as well
  - d. consider the parent who sits at the bedside of a sick child
8. The evangelical church of today stands in danger of losing the truth that God is angry at sin and that His wrath is a reality to be reckoned with
  - a. but if we jettison that truth, we lose a central part of the gospel
  - b. if God is not angry at sin, if He is not going to judge it, then what need is there of salvation?
  - c. what, pray tell, do we need to be saved from
  - d. this is why many people *reject* the gospel today - they have little consciousness of the wrath of God
  - e. we must remain faithful to this element of the gospel, no matter how unpopular it may be
  - f. don't forget that the same Chapter in the bible that says . . .

**(John 3:16) "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**

- g. also says
- (John 3:36) "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."**
9. The word for **wrath** in v. 18 does not refer to the kind of anger you and I are most familiar with
    - a. we're accustomed to a momentary, emotional quick flash of uncontrolled anger
    - b. this word speaks of a settled and determined indignation
  10. God's wrath is not some kind of an uncontrolled outburst against especially offensive acts
    - a. it doesn't depend on what kind of day He's had
    - b. it is consistent and unchanging
  11. He says, that the wrath of God **is revealed from heaven;**
    - a. it's a shock to realize that Paul uses the *present* tense here
    - b. in other words, he says that the wrath of God is *being* revealed from heaven, *right now*
    - c. we think of thunder and lightening
    - d. we think of Sodom and Gomorrah, or the Book of Revelation
    - e. God's wrath does occasionally find itself revealed in this way
    - f. but there is a way in which the wrath of God is being revealed right now, today, all around us
    - g. we'll see *how* in just a minute
  12. His wrath is directed against "**all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.**"
    - a. sin takes two directions: ungodliness & unrighteousness
    - b. ungodliness speaks of our duty to God
    - c. unrighteousness refers to our duty to others
  13. The end of v.18 and 19 gives us a brilliant diagnosis of what's wrong with mankind
  14. "**who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, {19} because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.** "
    - a. because the idea of a holy God who holds people accountable makes them uncomfortable
    - b. they *suppress* that truth; they try to hold it down and cover it up
    - c. we hear a lot about cover ups today
    - d. but this is the biggest cover up in history!
    - e. the words "suppress" means to hold something down that *will not* be *kept* down
    - f. it's a word which speaks of great energy and effort
    - g. like a cat under the covers
  15. The knowledge of God is clearly evident to all
  16. Paul says it is revealed IN men and women
  17. God has placed it in them
  18. When Miss Sullivan was working with Helen Keller, she came to a point when she tried to explain God to her
    - a. Keller was deaf, dumb, and blind

- b. yet still, when Sullivan told her of God, Keller replied that she had always known there must be a supreme being who had created all things
  - c. and now she was glad to know His name and more about Him
19. Paul drives this point home in vs. 20-21

### **B. Vs. 20-21**

**{20} For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,**

**{21} because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.**

1. God has revealed Himself through the creation
2. The creation requires a Creator
  - a. just as a watch requires a watchmaker
  - b. the universe requires a universe maker
  - c. Johannes Kepler, the brilliant mathematician and astronomer remarked, "The undevout astronomer is mad."
  - d. (Psa 19:1-2)

**The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. {2} Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge.**

3. Creation is not a *complete* revelation of God, but it does reveal some important things about Him
  - a. as Paul says here, it reveals His "eternal power"
  - b. and His "godhead"
4. But here is what man has done—they have taken the inborn knowledge of God's existence, and they have suppressed it
5. Because of that—all of life has become corrupted, disoriented, and out of balance
  - a. now, his thoughts are futile
    - 1) because the most basic thought, the foundation of all other thinking—that God exists, is suppressed
    - 2) therefore every other thought is based on a faulty premise, and so, subject to vanity
  - b. man's heart is dark because the light of truth has been put under a basket
  - c. man's heart is dark because the light of truth has been put under a basket
  - d. (Psa 14:1)

**The fool has said in his heart, "*There is no God.*"**

- e. Donald Barnhouse wrote,  
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 the man drive nails through it and place Him on a cross in the supreme demonstration that men are without excuse.

6. Now Paul shows how, having suppressed the truth about God, man slides ever down into sin

### **C. Vs. 22-23**

**{22} Professing to be wise, they became fools,**

**{23} and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man; and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.**

1. Though they try to suppress the truth, they can't; it keeps popping up
2. So they pervert the truth—they bend it, twist it, adapt and redefine it
3. Knowing that ultimately they cannot do away with the knowledge of God, they make their own substitute gods
4. They fashion idols
5. But even these show man's descent into darkness
  - a. first he makes an idol that looks like a man
  - b. but finding no real contentment with that he fashions another - a bird, an eagle that soars through the sky
  - c. but still he is not content, so he fashions an image of a beast, like a bull or a crocodile
  - d. but sinking even farther, he makes an idol shaped like a bug; maybe a scarab or a dung beetle
  - e. take a look at history; all these things have been worshipped
6. Man wanted a god he could control, who would do his bidding
  - a. the True God demands we submit to *Him*
  - b. rebel man will not, so he makes his own gods, ones he can control
  - c. this is one reason why I have serious trouble with the health and wealth message, the blab it and grab it gospel
    - 1) it turns God into nothing more than a cosmic bellhop
    - 2) who is manipulated by the bell of faith
    - 3) every time we ring it, He jumps to carry our bags

### **D. Vs. 24-25**

1. According to recent polls, 74% of adult Americans say they **strongly** believe there is a holy & perfect God who created the world and rules it
2. Another 12% agree with that statement *generally*
3. That means 86% of the population professes a significant faith in God
4. Now, I find that puzzling because I just don't see it
5. When you went out to get in your car today to go to church, were 8 in 10 of your neighbors getting in their cars too?
6. How about at work—do 8 in 10 of your fellow employees talk about the Lord at break?
7. You students; do 8 of 10 of your fellow students go to church and talk of their faith?
8. Let me read vs. 24-32 as they surely would be if people really lived like

they believe in God

Therefore, God gave them over in their hearts to self-control and purity, that their bodies might be considered the temples of the Holy Spirit. For they kept and cherished the truth of God and worshipped and served the Creator, who is blessed forever, rather than the creature. Amen

For this reason, God rewarded them with pure and wholesome lives, lived with carefree ease even in the most intimate relations so that all received in their own persons the due reward of their fidelity.

And just as they saw fit to acknowledge God in all things, God rewarded them with a sound mind, to do those things which are proper, being filled with all righteousness, goodness, generosity, kindness, full of selflessness, life, healing, openness, kindness, they are gentle in speech, always building others up, lovers of God, respectful, humble, self-effacing, inventors of good and helpful things, obedient to parents, understanding, trustworthy, loving, merciful; and as they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are possessors of life, they do the same, and give hearty approval to those who do likewise.

9. Obviously, that is *not* what Paul wrote
10. What he did write sounds much more true to what we witness in the world around us
11. And because of that, we must conclude Paul's diagnosis is an accurate one
12. Men and women ARE suppressing the truth!

**{24} Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,**

**{25} who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.**

13. In v. 18 Paul said the wrath of God is being revealed against all sin
14. Here he shows *how* it is being revealed: **God has given them up to their sin**
15. They chose to rebel against Him and try to suppress the truth: He lets them go and enjoy the results of their sin and rebellion
16. He gives them up to it! And we are seeing it

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17. The Scriptures are certainly *not* outdated
  18. If what Paul wrote here was true in his day, how much more in ours?
  19. Man has removed God from His rightful place and set himself up instead
  20. But in doing so, man has dehumanized himself
    - a. life has been degraded and perverted
    - b. how else can we account for abortion, euthanasia, infanticide, and genocide?
  21. Paul explains it this way, "God gave them up . . . "
    - a. three times he will use this phrase
    - b. He gave them up FOR their sin
    - c. and He gives them up TO their sin

#### **E. Vs. 26-27**

**{26} For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.**

**{27} Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.**

1. As Paul exposes man's slide into depravity, he begins with the sin of homosexuality
2. He does this because by its very nature, it is unnatural
  - a. it isn't merely a perversion,
  - b. it's an inversion
  - c. homosexuality is not a *normal* behavior
    - 1) is not biologically based
    - 2) it is sin
    - 3) and it is shameful
    - 4) that our culture has embraced it as a viable lifestyle does not mark us as enlightened,
    - 5) rather it shows our *depravity*
3. History tells the sad and sorry tale that whenever a civilization has entered into the final stages of its decline, it is attended by a whole group of social and moral ills
4. Noticeable among these is the acceptance of homosexuality
5. When Paul wrote this, the Roman empire was already beginning to see many of these things accepted as norms
6. Corinth, the city he wrote this from was known for its moral corruption and sexual perversions
7. Paul knew that homosexuality brought with it a curse; so he wrote, **"receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due."**
  - a. there are a host of physical and emotional problems homosexuals are prone to because of their lifestyle
  - b. including, incontinence and rampant venereal disease

#### **F. Vs. 28-32**

**{28} And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;**

**{29} being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers,**

**{30} backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,**

**{31} undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;**

**{32} who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.**

1. These things are all serious and bad
2. But the real clincher is v. 32

**{32} who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.**

3. These things are broadcast each day on TV for our entertainment
4. What a challenge this is as we ask what it is we allow ourselves to be entertained by
5. We look back and decry the crowds in the Roman Coliseum who cheered on the gladiators and wild animals as they brutally killed one another
6. But are we any different as we sit in front of our TV's and watch many of the weekly shows?

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. *Hard Things*

1. What can we learn from all this?
2. Several things actually . . .
  - a. first of all; we learn that the Bible makes a clear distinction between people
    - 1) either they are obedient followers of God
    - 2) or they are suppressing the truth
  - b. second; the road that does not lead to God leads ever down into the darkness of sin
    - 1) sin is progressive
    - 2) it moves from bad to worse
    - 3) if a person rejects God, the only option left them is depravity and perversion

#### B. *The Wrath Of God*

1. The Good News of Jesus Christ is that he came to save us from the certain wrath of God
2. That is a part of our presentation of the gospel we must never soft sell

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3. There was a farmer who was a godless man who had a field right next to a church
4. Each Sunday morning when the people would be in worship, he would drive his tractor through his field and take great delight in disrupting their service
5. At the end of the harvest that Fall, that field yielded a bumper crop
6. And taking pride in his defiance of God, he sent a letter to the local paper claiming there mustn't be a God because his harvest had been so great
7. The pastor of that church sent a short letter back that was printed the next week

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8. It simply said, "God doesn't settle all His accounts in October."

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9. You may be living without God this morning, and you may be enjoying a bumper crop of the pleasures of sin
10. But be sure you understand this, God will settle all His accounts
11. He may not settle them in February, or March, but He will settle them
12. He will settle yours!
13. So, you have a choice; face His *wrath*, or receive His *forgiveness*
14. You see, He can be just and still forgive you because Someone has paid for



your sin  
15. That's what Jesus did on the cross