

## Without Excuse – Romans 1:18-23

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. Read Psalm 19:1-6

#### B. Sales

1. I happened to be at South Coast Plaza in OC Friday.
  2. As I walked through the mall with Matt Valencia from CC Gilroy, we saw a line of people up ahead.
  3. The store they were standing in front of had the distinctive Apple logo on it.
    - a. It was 5:45 PM. In 15 minutes the doors would open & sales of the new iPhone would begin.
    - b. The line wrapped around the mall with hundreds of people waiting to get their hands on one of the new phones at \$500 to \$600 a pop.
    - c. The first 20 people in line had been given special T-Shirts that said, “I was there on 6/29/07.”
    - d. An employee of one of the stores across from the Apple store said they’d begun queuing up a little after 1 AM.
  4. Now, here’s what was interesting—
    - a. While we watched, people *in line* were taking out their cell phones, flipping them open, & taking pictures & video of the line.
    - b. Others were chatting with people, telling them they were in line to get a new iPhone.
    - c. All of this on perfectly good cell phones!
    - d. But they were now going to shell out not a little money to get the latest & greatest of mobile tech.
  5. I’m sure the motivations of all those people for *why* they wanted an iPhone were vast & varied, but I wonder how many were there because of the ads that have been run on TV lately.
  6. I have a perfectly good cellphone. It’s a Smartphone and does everything I need it to.
  7. But I admit, when I saw the TV ad for the iPhone, I found myself saying, “OOO! That’s so sexy. I *want* one.”
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8. Yeah – but I don’t *need* one.
  9. I had to have a quick talk with myself that I have be on guard against advertising that’s aimed at confusing wants with needs.
  10. You see, modern marketing understands the way to sell stuff to people who really already have everything, is to get them to promote *wants* to the level of *needs*;
    - a. To convince potential customers that their product isn’t just a *convenience*,
    - b. But a *necessity* that will bring them the quality of life they *not only need but have a right to*.

#### C. Today

1. In Romans, Paul follows a similar plan in convincing his readers.
2. Only here, he attempts to promote an absolute, unqualified essential *need* to the level of an urgent *want*.
3. What he brings them is the Gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.
4. But before anyone will seek a Savior, they must *realize* their desperate condition.
5. So having summarized the Gospel in vs. 16 & 17 as we saw last week, Paul turns to describe humanity’s *need* for the Gospel in the rest of ch. 1.

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6. As we begin, let me say what we’re about to look at isn’t pretty.
  7. It’s going to take a couple weeks to get through it & as a faithful teacher of God’s Word I’m going to have to share some difficult things.
  8. Some of what we’ll look at is *politically incorrect*, but it’s *Kingdom-correct*, so we’ll deal with it.

### II. TEXT

#### A. Vs. 18-19

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

1. As we saw last week, “Gospel” means *good* news.
2. To be honest, MOST people don’t see the message of Jesus Christ as GOOD news, they consider it a bother, an annoyance.
3. It’s only GOOD news when a person’s experienced the conviction of the Holy Spirit & seen their sin for what it is; a big, black hideous ball & chain that’s dragging them to hell.
4. *Only then* will the promise of forgiveness & new life appear as the wonderful thing it is.
5. Without the conviction of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel just comes off sounding like little more than a sales pitch for an irrelevant religion.

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- 5a. To the humanist, the Gospel is an insult because it says man is fallen, broken, corrupt, & bent toward evil. The humanist thinks man is good & his becomes own savior through science & education.
6. Paul understood this, so he begins by showing that not only is God a God of love & righteousness as he says in v. 17, He's also a **God of wrath**.
7. This makes people uncomfortable so they reject it as old fashioned/unenlightened.
- Many modern theologians have made themselves God's image consultants & have altered His resume by stripping Him of any anger or wrath.
  - They've turned Him into a kindly grandfather who does little more than rock away the years on the front porch of heaven, telling stories to anyone who drops by.
  - For many today, the Bible only has one verse in it – John 3:16.
    - "God is love," 1 John 4:8 says.
    - Many think the word "is" there is an equal sign so that they can say, "Love is God."
    - But 1 John 4:8 is not a mathematical formula. God is not EQUAL to love.
    - There's MUCH MORE TO GOD than just love.
8. God is **also** righteous, just, holy, & perfect in all His attributes.
9. **BECAUSE** God is righteous, He **opposes** sin.
- Because He's holy, He resists evil.
  - Because He's just, He rewards right & judges wrong.
10. You know, it's interesting to me that this is the behavior & character people expect of human judges, but they don't want **God** to exhibit them.
- Or maybe it would be more accurate to say we want the judge to be righteous & just when it comes **to everyone else**,
  - But to be **lenient** when we find **ourselves** standing at the bar.
11. Psalm 45:7) says of God - **You love righteousness and hate wickedness**.
- God loves people. It's precisely **BECAUSE** He loves them that He hates **what harms them**.
  - Evil harms, sin destroys. That's why God hates it!
12. When Luke as about 3, he had a terrible earache.
- Lynn was at a women's function so I was home alone with him.
  - I'd given him some children's aspirin but it hadn't done much to relieve the pain.
  - He was a pretty tough little guy but he was in agony. His cries had become grunts & growls of pain.
  - He begged me to make it stop. I just held him, prayed & wept with him.
  - I was angry! Really, really angry at the infection in his body that was causing that earache.
  - I would have done anything to fight it, to remove it, to even take it on myself if I could, but I was powerless.
13. God loves people, so He **hates** the sin & evil that tears them apart & drags them to eternal ruin.
14. It was God's love that moved Him to enter into the human race & take on Himself sin & death so man could be free.
15. In love, He patiently sends the Message of forgiveness through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
16. But His righteousness restrains Him from **forcing His will** on people.
- He's given them the power to choose & will not take it away. He **honors** the choices we make.
  - Because** God is holy & just, **His wrath abides on sin**.
  - Those who hold on to sin are under God's wrath because they've **CHOSEN** to be there.
  - They're not helpless victims; they're willing rebels.
17. God does not **OVERLOOK** sin in His love for sinful man.
- He deals with it through the cross so that man & sin can be **separated**,
  - Then His justice **condemns sin** while His **love embraces** repentant & forgiven men & women.
18. Listen, if God is not angry at sin, if He's not going to judge it, **what need is there of salvation?**
- What, pray tell, do we need to be saved **from**?
  - Many reject the gospel today because they have little awareness of the **justice** of God.
  - They see no need of a Savior because they think God has only one attribute—Love.
  - What they need to know is that the same chapter that says God so loved the world He gave His only Son, in v. 36 says **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**.
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19. The word **wrath** in v. 18 refers to a settled, determined indignation because something is wrong.
- It's not the kind of anger that flies off in a rage at the least provocation.
  - It's not impetuous or selfish.
  - It's a constant, abiding, active opposition to something that simply ought not be.
20. And that's why Paul says here that this wrath of God **is revealed** -
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- a. He uses the present tense. The wrath of God *is being revealed* right now. The wrath of God is revealed in several ways.
    - 1) One of the ways it's revealed is in the conviction the Spirit brings the sinner, urging him/her to repent.
    - 2) Another way God's wrath is revealed is in occasional historical events that remind us of God's holiness & *active* opposition to evil.
      - a) The Great Flood of Noah's time.
      - b) The confusion of languages at Babel.
      - c) The destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah.
      - d) The plagues of Egypt.
      - e) And the conquest of Canaan, which was the stoke of God's justice against the unspeakably evil practices of the Canaanites.
      - f) The Book of Revelation is filled with visions of plagues & catastrophes that mark the wrath of God on a Christ-rejecting world.
  - b. But there's another more subtle way the wrath of God is being revealed that we'll take a look at next week as we finish ch. 1.
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21. Paul says God's wrath is directed against "all *ungodliness & unrighteousness* of men."
    - a. Sin takes 2 basic directions: ungodliness & unrighteousness
    - b. Ungodliness speaks of our duty to God, summarized in the first 4 of the 10 Commandments.
    - c. Unrighteousness refers to our duty to others, found in the last 6.
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22. Paul ends v. 18 by saying those under God's wrath "suppress the truth in unrighteousness."
    - a. He paints a rich picture by his use of the word "suppress" here.
    - b. It means to hold something down that by its nature *can't* be held down.
  23. Some years ago, we had a cat who had a litter of kittens.
    - a. They got into something nasty & smelled terrible, so I thought it would be a good idea to wash them.
    - b. I filled up the kitchen sink with warm water, grabbed the first cat & tried to stick it in the water.
    - c. I could not believe how fast that animal slipped out of my hand, clawed it's way up my arm, lashed out at my face, and launched off my shoulder.
    - d. That's just a perfect picture of this word "suppress."
  24. Because the idea of a righteous, just & holy God who holds people *accountable* makes people uncomfortable, they try to pretend it's not true.
    - a. But as much as they pretend, the idea keeps popping up.
    - b. It annoys them that having dismissed the holiness of God it should continue to trouble them.
    - c. So they pretend a little harder & search for arguments that will ease their guilty conscience.
    - d. When the arguments don't bring relief, they try to ignore it by turning up the volume on the distractions in life.
    - e. No matter where they turn, the truth of God is always there.
    - f. The claim of righteousness on their soul cannot be silenced, so they run in the opposite direction, thinking sin will drown it out.
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25. In v. 19 Paul makes a statement we need to pay special attention to.
  26. He says the knowledge of God is *clearly* evident to all. It's something God has revealed **IN** people.
  27. Because of the work of radical materialists & secular humanists over the last 50 years, many people think the whole idea of God is something foreign to humanity.
    - a. We're told that religion only exists as an out-dated hold-over from ancient history when man couldn't explain the forces of nature so he attributed them to deities.
    - b. But now that science has explained the laws of nature, we no longer need religion & can move on to a more enlightened place.
  28. With a sweep of his pen, modern man does away with over 2,000 years of some of the greatest work humanity's brightest thinkers have done when they recognized in the soul of men & women a universal & *intuitive* sense of the existence of God.
  29. When Miss Sullivan was working with Helen Keller, she came to a point when she tried to explain God to her.
    - a. As you know, Keller was born deaf, dumb, & blind.
    - b. Yet when Sullivan told her of God, Keller replied she'd always known there *must* be a supreme being who had created all things.
    - c. She was glad to know His name & more about Him.
  30. Beside the persistent & insistent *intuitive* awareness of God's existence is an *even greater proof*.

**B. V. 20**

<sup>20</sup>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,

1. In a humorous play on words, Paul says that though God is invisible, His existence and power are *made visible* through what He's made – the creation.
2. Just as a watch requires a watchmaker & we can learn *something* about the watchmaker from that watch,
3. So creation requires a Creator & there are things we can learn about Him from His creation.
4. In Psalm 19 David spoke of how the sky is a manuscript to all humanity on the existence of God.
5. The starry expanse of the night sky is a global announcement of God's existence.
6. Now, creation doesn't tell us *everything* there is to know about God, but it presents us with at least 1 undeniable reality as Paul says here.
7. It tells us without rational debate, that . . .

**C. God Exists**

1. I won't go in to a long explanation now because I've done that at other times.
2. This morning let me just say that the *fact of creation necessarily DEMANDS* the existence of God.
3. You see, if there was ever a time when there was nothing, then there would be nothing now because nothing is no thing and no thing can do nothing.
4. That there is *something* now, proves there **MUST BE** something which by its very definition stands as the origin / source of all other things.
5. But this first thing must *own its own existence* & itself be uncaused. In other words, it's eternal.
6. Remember when you were a kid & asked your parents where something came from?
  - a. You eventually got to the place where they would say, "God made it."
  - b. Then you'd ask, "Who made God?" And that's where they'd get frustrated and tell you to be quiet.
  - c. Here's the problem – When we speak of God, we're speaking of someone who's eternal, so the question, "Who made God" is irrelevant.
  - d. It doesn't apply because it's mixing categories of being.
  - e. To ask, "Who made God?" is similar to asking, "Is blue chocolate?" or "Who painted Tuesday?"
    - 1) You're mixing categories that don't relate.
    - 2) Blue isn't a food, & chocolate isn't a color. You can't paint a day of the week
    - 3) And God can't be made because He's always been.
7. In fact, that's the point – that there IS something now, DEMANDS by a simple extension of logic, that there has always been one thing which owns it's own existence and is eternal, which is what we mean by the Biblical concept of God.
  - a. It's where the Bible starts.
  - b. Genesis 1:1 – In the beginning God created, the heavens & the earth.
8. His *omnipotence* is made clear in the vastness & complexity of the universe.
  - a. At the same time unbelieving scientists like Richard Dawkins are writing best-sellers like *The God Delusion* that deny the existence of God –
  - b. Space-based telescopes are sending back more & more images of previously unknown galaxies.
  - c. Some of these pictures are staggering in their beauty.
  - d. Astronomers had no idea the universe held such incredibly breath-taking sights.
  - e. Every week, the universe gets bigger & more crowded with the evidence of God's power.
  - f. Johannes Kepler, the brilliant mathematician & father of modern astronomer had only a crude telescope yet remarked, "The undevout astronomer is mad."
    - 1) Kepler belief in God wasn't because he lived in a superstitious age.
    - 2) He believed *because he was a scientist* who followed the logic of what a scientific mind *demand*ed.
    - 3) Stars require an all-powerful star-maker. The sky requires an eternal sky-maker.
9. Ask atheists Richard Dawkins or Sam Harris where everything came from & they'll point to the big bang.
  - a. But that's not a logically sufficient answer. The big bang is an *event* not an *cause*.
  - b. The big bang is simply the point in time when the singularity of all energy began the process of becoming the universe we know today.
  - c. The question we're asking is: Where did that singularity come from?
  - d. It cannot itself be eternal because it's part of the cause & effect universe.
  - e. The singularity that became the big bang logically owes it's existence to some eternal & all-powerful thing that exists in a different category of being. = GOD!

9. Now here's the deal – this is so clear, so straightforward, man is left without any excuse when it comes to believing in God.
10. Richard Dawkins has written a few books now attempting to give an intellectual basis for his denial of God.
  - a. His latest, *The God Delusion*, though a best-seller, is a joke, as sympathetic reviewers have admitted.
  - b. Bertrand Russell wrote a scathing rebuttal of Christianity many years ago titled *Why I Am Not A Christian*.
    - 1) It's arguments against faith became the main points many critics used for decades.
    - 2) I wondered what all the hubbub was about so I read it cautiously, concerned I might encounter something I couldn't answer.
    - 3) I was surprised to find every single point to be easily refuted by either logic or God's Word.
    - 4) There were no philosophical bombshells nor logical conundrums that threatened faith.
11. No – as Paul says so clearly here, all the evidence stacks up in **FAVOR** of the God of the Bible.
12. Man is *without excuse* when it comes to denying God.
13. In Psalm 14:1 we learn something important about the atheist. **"The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."**
  - a. He says this in his *heart*, not head. Ultimately, it's not that the atheist *can't* believe; he won't believe.
  - b. She's not an unbeliever for a lack of evidence but for lack of will.

#### D. V. 21

**<sup>21</sup>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. Paul explains why God's wrath is being revealed against those who reject Him.
2. First of all (v. 18), because they knowingly & willfully keep denying the truth about God that stares them in the face.
3. Second (v. 19), God has placed an undeniable intuition for His existence within them they spend their lives resisting.
4. Third (v.20), the simple & universal logic of creation demands the existence of God so that all are without excuse if they deny Him.
5. Here in v. 21, Paul gives a fourth reason for the wrath of God on unbelievers.
6. Because although faced with the inevitability that truth, intuition, & logic all combine to leave men & women with only one conclusion – God exists, instead of yielding to that inescapable fact,
  - a. They take the idea of God & alter it, removing those aspects of His character they don't like
  - b. And replacing them with attributes that allow them to give lip-service to God but without having to change.
7. Instead of giving Him the glory & thanks due Him, they *edit* Him & turn Him into a tamer deity; One who demands little but gives much.
8. They think they're better than the atheist who denies God because they fancy themselves believers.
  - a. But their god is an *idol*, a deity of their own making.
  - b. And because there's a spiritual law that we become like the god we worship,
  - c. Having fashioned their god from their desires, all of life begins to break down.
  - d. They begin a long, slow slide into spiritual darkness.

#### E. Vs. 22-23

**<sup>22</sup>Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup>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. I never cease to marvel at the arrogance of unbelievers who applaud their lack of faith as making them morally superior to those who believe in God.
2. In his latest book, Dawkins blames religion & faith in God for virtually all the woes & tragedies of history.
3. He claims it's enlightened men & women who've thrown off the shackles of faith in God that have brought the most benefit to humanity.
4. Really? Does he mean such wonderful characters as Karl Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Mao Tse Tung, & Adolf Hitler?
  - a. I wonder who Dawkins thinks started public education, literacy campaigns, the abolition of slavery, orphanages, hospitals, & nearly every university & college in Europe & the New World.
  - b. Does Dawkins know who's the major contributor to relief efforts around the world, & what organizations are usually the first on the scene in virtually every global catastrophe?
  - c. It's not him & his atheist buddies. It's Christians who are compelled by the love of Christ to reach out to the poor & needy.
5. Those who deny God think they are so smart **BECAUSE** of their unbelief. In fact, they're fools because they reject the basis of all wisdom – the knowledge & fear of God.
6. And having done so, they begin a long, slow slide into spiritual darkness.
7. A slide we're seeing played out in our own day.
8. V. 23 charts it. Man was created to worship God.

- a. When he rejects God, the *urge to worship* turns to the next thing – *man*, who bears the fallen image of God. *Secular humanism* is nothing but the enthronement of man in the place of God.
  - b. But man without God senses something vital is missing from life so he finds *inspiration* in the birds that soar though the heavens & worships them.
  - c. He senses a lack the power he was meant to possess, so he worships the lion, tiger, & bear.
  - d. Finding no satisfaction in any of these idols, he falls to the place of worshipping reptiles & bugs, like the dung beetle of the Egyptians, an insect that lives in manure!
9. Archaeologists & anthropologists have found in every corner of the world evidence to verify man’s insatiable appetite for worship.
  10. Modern man is no less wired for worship than the ancients.
    - a. The environmental movement & deep ecology is nothing but one of secular humanism’s many religions,
    - b. A religion that deifies the Earth & nature & places more value in birds, beasts, & bugs than human beings.

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. *Not Real Cheery*

1. I end here. This hasn’t been a real cheery message today.
2. Paul doesn’t intend to be cheery. He paints an honest, accurate picture of *man without God*.
3. Contrary to the most basic tenet of the humanism of our time, man is *not* basically good. He’s a moral & spiritual wreck.
4. Without God, man is messed up.
5. And in light of all the evidence, there’s *no excuse* for his’s unbelief.
6. 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.

7. What I hope you take away from today’s study is that contrary to what many are saying today, belief in God is **NOT** an irrational leap of pure faith unsupported by the evidence.
8. No! A thousand times NO!
9. We believe precisely **BECAUSE** reason, logic, & the evidence all point to only one conclusion, one truth that no amount of rhetoric or clever semantics can suppress – God IS.
10. ***Even more, the God of the Bible IS.***