

SOUND DOCTRINE FOR SPIRITUAL SUCCESS – Studies in Romans

Lost and Fallen Humanity (Romans 1:18-23)

In reading Romans 1:16-17, a non-Christian might ask, “salvation from what?” Paul answers that question immediately in v18 in a manner that is instructive for all of us. A lost and fallen humanity is in desperate need of being rescued from the wrath of God! Just as Paul uses the verb “revealed” in the present tense in v17, he does so as well in v18. In other words, God’s righteousness is a double-edged sword. It provides justification for the sinner, but it also condemns us in our sin. And no one can plead innocence by means of ignorance when confronted with the righteous wrath of God. The witness of creation eliminates that excuse. Notice Paul’s clear and unmistakable presentation of this truth in Romans 1:18-20, where we read this –

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 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.”

Every individual possesses the image of God within, expressed through intellect, emotion and will (Genesis 1:26-27). This gives everyone the capacity to process the created order in a manner which reveals to them the existence of the One who created it all (cf. Psalm 19:1-4). The bad news that stands in stark contrast to the good news of the gospel, is that all of us suppress (resist) the truth of God’s existence. The tragic irony of this willful suppression is that it produces a desire for substitution, resulting in idolatry (v23). In rejecting the true God, that void in the human heart invariably becomes preoccupied with a false god (Isaiah 44:9-20).

Paul, in using the present tense for the verb “revealed” in v18, makes it clear that fallen humanity’s resistance to the witness of creation is an ongoing process. But then he quickly switches to the past tense in vv21-23, in possibly making reference to a specific point in Biblical history. In all likelihood, it would be the period between the fall of Adam and the Flood of Noah; where God dealt more directly with individuals, as indicated in Genesis 6:1-12. In that passage, God affirms that His Spirit will not strive with man in his sin, indefinitely (6:3). God also expresses His regret for making man (6:5-6), and then declares a judgment of utter destruction against the people of Noah’s generation (6:7; 6:13-17).

The idolatrous, unethical and immoral decay of the human race has produced a downward spiral toward death and destruction ever since. **What Christians in the Church Age must realize is that it is not our responsibility to directly confront and restrain such broad-based corruption (1 Corinthians 5:12-13).** God has instituted human government for that purpose through the enforcement of law and order (Romans 13:1-7). Our role in this process involves confronting the decay indirectly, by means of our example (Matthew 5:14-16; John 13:34-35), as well as a verbal witness for our Savior (Acts 1:8; 1 Peter 3:13-16). In this manner, through one conversion to Christ at a time, individuals can be rescued from the wrath of God; delivered from the downward spiral of a human race, lost and fallen in sin (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Ephesians 2:1-10). This is priority one of the Great Commission Mandate; to be fulfilled by every follower of Jesus Christ.