

Romans 1

Unbelief and Its Consequences

18For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, **19**because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

IGNORANCE OF THE LAW IS NO EXCUSE

I remember driving from Duluth to Buffalo, New York about 15 years ago. It was a very long drive. But when I went through Ohio I got a pleasant surprise. The speed limit was very high. I think the speed limit was at least 65 or perhaps even 70 miles per hour. It is a very long state traveling west to east and so I was glad to be able to tear through the state doing 70 mph.

Then I entered Pennsylvania and headed north to Western New York. I kept my speed steady using the cruise control. But soon after entering New York I saw flashing red lights in my rear view mirror. The police car pulled me over and when the officer approached my car he asked me why I felt the need to drive 15 miles per hour over the speed limit. Apparently New York was one of the last states to hang on to the old 55 mile per hour speed limit even on their super highways.

I told him that I did not realize the speed limit changed when I got out of Ohio. Apparently I did not pay attention to the speed limit signs after I crossed the border. Now I thought I made a pretty persuasive argument about why I should not get a ticket, but according to the officer, ignorance of the law is not a valid excuse in New York State or anywhere for that matter.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER HEARD?

I have had a number of people ask me whether people who live in the depths of the Amazon Jungle never hearing the gospel message of faith in

Christ will be held to account for their sins. We might make the argument that they are ignorant of God's laws. They are ignorant of saving faith in Jesus Christ. They do not know about the one true God that demands worship and obedience. It seems kind of cruel when you deal with matters of eternal life or death to throw out a statement like "ignorance of the law is no good excuse." But the truth according to God's Word is that when it comes to a basic knowledge of God none of us are truly ignorant. Heaven or hell will not catch us by surprise.

20For 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.

There are art experts that can walk up to a painting and without even looking at the signature can identify the author. They can see certain signature brush strokes and images and color combinations that clearly identify the painting with a specific artist.

Within each person there is a conscience that testifies that God created all we see. Why do we get a refreshing feeling when we walk through the woods and look at the lush vegetation? Why do we get a warm feeling when we sit by a lake and hear the waves play a rhythmic tune against the banks of the shore? When we look into the sky at the vast expanse of stars and galaxies something within us wants to rise up and say, "Yes, there is a great God!"

There is a book by a guy named Richardson called "eternity in their hearts" in which he gives the account of how every culture and people group has come to a basic understanding of God through a thoughtful observation of God's creation. Even in the remotest jungles the tribes have had knowledge of God and have had to either accept it or reject it.

And when we study geology and the planets we know there was a bang but we also know that great order came out of a bang. When we explode something it always results in a big mess. So how did the amazing orderliness of the universe come out of a huge explosion?

STORY – EXPLODING CYLINDARS

When I was young I had a nasty habit of collecting small co₂ cylinders and blowing them up. I used to wrap a bunch of air cylinders from pellet guns in gas soaked rags. And then my friends and I would light them on fire and stand behind a tree until they exploded with a huge bang. Each time I looked at the blown cylinders they were an ugly twisted mess with many bits missing, embedded in the ground and nearby tree trunks and occasionally the closest fence or garage.

To say that the carefully constructed world we see was an accident would be just like blowing up a pile of co₂ cylinders and then after the explosion somehow the flying shards of metal colleted themselves in midair and formed themselves into a Swiss pocket watch that told accurate time.

The truth is that the most simple or sophisticated person can observe the world and discover evidence for the existence of a Holy God. Let's take a look at what is going on in the scientific world that leaves the scientist with no good excuse for failing to acknowledge or desire the Lord.

EXERPTS – “GOD THE EVIDENCE” by Patrick Glynn

The Scientific Evidence

P22-23. In plainer English, the anthropic principle says that all the seemingly arbitrary and unrelated constants in physics have one thing in common – these are precisely the values you need if you want to have a universe capable of producing life.

In essence, the anthropic principle came down to the observation that all the myriad laws of physics were fine-tuned from the very beginning of the universe for the creation of man – that the universe we inhabit appeared to be expressly designed for the emergence of human beings.

P25. In effect, the “random universe” was out the window. There was nothing random at all about the arrangement of the cosmos – as physicists quickly began to see. The vast, fifteen-billion-year evolution of the universe had apparently been directed toward one goal; the creation of human life.

The Psychological Evidence

Suicide

A large-scale study found that persons who did not attend church were four times as likely to commit suicide than were frequent church attenders. Lack of church attendance has been found to be the single best predictor of suicide rates, better even than unemployment.

Drug Abuse

One survey of nearly 14,000 youths found that substance abuse varied in direct proportion to the strength of religious commitment, with the most conservative religious youths abusing the least. The authors concluded that importance of religion was the single best predictor of substance abuse patterns.

Depression and Stress

Several studies have found that high levels of religious commitment correlate with lower levels of depression, lower levels of stress, and greater ability to cope with stress. Religious people recover from surgery more quickly than do their atheistic and agnostic counterparts.

The evidence from cosmology and psychology and every field of study known to man and even simple observations from the remote tribes in

the Amazon Jungle point to the truth that no one has a good excuse to say that there is no God. For a variety of reasons many of the simple and sophisticated people of the world have no desire for God.

21For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

If someone does not even want to acknowledge that God exists they are never going to begin a journey of discovery that will lead to saving faith in Jesus Christ. They will speculate about things that do not matter in light of eternity.

The writer of Hebrews spoke of this basic knowledge in stating, ***“and without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).***

But since some human beings have, in fact, suppressed the truth about God, the following calamities ensued:

1. People can not glorify or worship a God they do not believe in
2. People cannot feel thankful to a nonexistent deity.
3. People’s thinking becomes pointless, because you live and you die and that is all there is for those who do not believe in God.
4. The light of truth fades away from those who do not believe in God. If there is no God there is no right or wrong.

22Professing to be wise, they became fools,

STORY - THE WISDOM OF FOOLS

Once upon a time there was a very smart physics professor who taught on the laws of gravity. He was so pleased with himself that he knew more than anyone about the laws of gravity and physics. One day he went

skydiving and when he jumped out of the plane he was exhilarated. He was amazed at how funny his stomach felt as he pulled Gs from his free fall. He began to work calculations in his head about the forces of gravity and he figured out how many Gs he was pulling. Then he began to calculate in his head his rate of descent. When he was done with that, he began calculating...SPLAT!!! ...his sudden and unexpected appearance before the throne of a Holy God.

It is possible to be very wise and learned but at the same time become a fool. Some become a fool by becoming enamored with their own wisdom and intelligence. Others become fool by worshipping people and others become foolish because they worship nature.

23and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

It is possible to have any number of idols. Perhaps we do not worship birds or animals or pray to statues. But I think our temptation is to lift up other people or the things we desire much higher than we ought to. An idol is anything you organize your life and desires around that means more to you than God. Lets do an idol check up.

IDOLATRY CHECK

Here are some questions to help you see if your attitudes are like idolatry.

- Who created you?
- Where do you look for ultimate truth?
- To whom or where do you look for security and happiness?
- Who is in charge of your future?
- What do you think you can't live without?

- Who do you think you can't live without?
- What priority in your life is greater than God?
- What dream would you sacrifice everything to realize?

24Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

STORY – WE BECOME OUR CHOICES

I knew a man who was very zealous for the Lord. He attended my friend's church every time the doors were open. It was great to see this guy becoming more and more involved in the life of the church. But there was something a little unsettling about this dear soul. He seemed to have a strong desire to prove how spiritual he was to other people. And he would use the church to show everyone how great he was. During the sharing time in Sunday service he would stand up and begin preaching a sermon from a bible text and carry on for 20 minutes. And my friend reported that this gentleman would storm into the elder meetings and try to force the elders to kick the pastor out and let him do the preaching. He had a lot of head knowledge but it did not appear his first desire was to honor God and glorify God. It appeared that he was trying to fill some hole in his life by getting everyone to center his or her attention on him.

After a couple years of this type of activity I believe God gave him over to a spirit of pride. He became more and more outrageous and jealous of the pastor and anyone who got attention that eventually he blew up and went to another church only to do the same thing.

It may be a drug addition, or a drinking problem or an anger problem. Or it might look like religious activity that glorifies a person instead of the

Lord. But at some point in time God gives people over to dive headlong into their sin until they either become their choices and get locked into their sin or idolatry forever or they get sick of it and begin once again to desire God more than anything else in the world.

It is not a fun place to be given over to sin. That is a terrible and lonely place. Today would be a good day to let go of those things that you and I have put in front of our Holy God. He will not let us skate along forever hanging on to two worlds.

TAKING IT HOME

1. Have you ever fell into the attitude that you knew a lot of stuff in your head but you lacked a deep sense of desire for God?
2. How often do you remember to give thanks to God? Are you finding creating ways to count your blessings and make a heart felt list of the things that you are thankful for?
3. Are there any idols that you are hanging onto that you want to get rid of before God gives you over to them totally? It might be an attitude you have or an addiction or even religious pride. It could be anything. What is God putting on your heart right now that he wants you do deal with so that you do not have to be given over to it?