

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

May 4th, 2025

Pastor Adam Parker

Sermon Title: Everybody Knows

Sermon Text: Romans 1:18-21

Rom. 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Rom. 1:19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

Rom. 1:20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Rom. 1:21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Main Point: Fallen human beings know of God's existence, power, and wrath, and yet suppress that truth, showing that mankind's biggest problem is not knowledge or education, but a matter the heart.

Outline:

1. Recognition of God's Existence
2. Revelation of God's Nature
3. Rebellion Against God's Truth

Introduction

So at the beginning of our reading, Paul speaks about the wrath of God. And you might expect me to do the verse by verse thing and talk about God's wrath. But many times as we go through Romans you may be surprised that I will give an important topic its own sermon. And I plan to do that in this case. What that means is, if you follow what Paul is saying here, he's telling all of us that God's wrath is real. Even that claim is deeply unpleasant – not just to modern readers but ancient ones, too. And we will talk about that topic next week, and I will make a serious effort to make you see what God sees – namely that his wrath is an expression of His character and holiness, and because of that, we should prize it. So that will be next week.

But this week we need to see something behind his argument about God's wrath. Because notice what Paul does. He begins by saying “the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and righteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”

In two weeks we will talk about this idea of self-deception, which Paul brings up here. Because you know the truth and [Paul is saying] you intentionally resist it. And Paul is saying that when you do this, you really are choosing to fool yourself – which is self-deception. So that will be in two weeks. So you can see, we're going to be hovering around this section for a few weeks.

But let's stick with the argument here and follow it through. In verse 19 he says God's wrath is revealed, “FOR what can be known about God is plain to them.” So today we're going to look at the basis of God's wrath as Paul speaks of it here.

Why is God wrathful against mankind? Because he tells us, we do know God, we know who he is, we know what he's like, and we knowingly reject Him.

In fact, rather than say more here, let me give you the outline: First point, Recognition of God's existence (everyone knows God is there). Second point, Revelation of God's nature (everyone knows what God is like). Then third point, Rebellion Against God's Truth (Everyone Naturally Resists God).

So a lot of this intro has just been me telling you what we won't be paying attention to today, and then promising what we will get to in the next couple of weeks. Next week, the wrath of God. The week after, the reality of self-deception.

I want you to see, today, that much of Paul's concern is about what we know, but it's also about what we then *do* with what we know.

1. Recognition of God's Existence

Our first point is, recognition of God's existence. Paul tells us that everyone knows God is there.

“What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them” (1:19).

Three things I want to bring out here.

First, notice who does the revealing of this knowledge.

It is God himself. God reveals himself in nature. This is why theologians refer to what is known of God to all people as “natural revelation.”

Pay attention to this language at the end of verse 19: “God has shown it to them.” It is not just that every human being is incredible wise or perceptive or understanding. Paul says that the reason we know what we know and have the information that what we know comes to us as God's own revelation. God has shown himself to us. He has shown it, and that's why we've known it.

All truth comes from God, it doesn't originate with us. Every scientific discovery, every apprehension of the truth that we enjoy... all of it is ours only because God has chosen to give it to us... to allow us to see it. He has revealed these things to us.

This was the perspective of those leaders during the foundational years of the scientific revolution.

Johannes Kepler, who was known for his laws of planetary motion, for example, said this: “Since we astronomers are priests of the highest God in regard to the book of nature, it benefits us to be thoughtful, not of the glory of our minds, but rather, above all else, of the glory of God.” He then went on to say that in his work on astronomy all he was doing was “thinking God's thoughts after him.”

Robert Boyle, writing in the 1600s, said this: “When with bold telescopes I survey the old and newly discovered stars and planets... and with excellent microscopes discern nature’s curious workmanship... the inanimate particles of matter... that through their various motions and combinations produce... all the phenomena of nature; I seem to myself to be, as it were, admitted into the cabinet of the Almighty Architect.”

Louis Pasteur, the microbiologist and chemist said this in the 1800s: “The more I study nature, the more I stand amazed at the work of the Creator. Into his tiniest creatures, God has placed extraordinary properties... Science brings men nearer to God.”

These men were experts in studying the book of nature, but they never saw themselves as discovering this of themselves, from themselves. They always saw it as God’s disclosure of himself. That is Paul’s perspective as well. “*God* has shown it to them.”

Every single thing that we know of God, including his existence, happens by way of *self*-disclosure. So everything Paul is going to say here – and in fact everything that we know about God at all – always happens through his own willful self-disclosure. God does not owe us a glimpse of him. He does not owe creatures any information about himself at all. We know who God is because he wants us to know who he is, because he chooses to show himself to us. My encouragement to you is that every true thing that you know ought to be received with thankfulness.

When you hear a sermon, or read a passage of Scripture, or hear a beautiful symphony... anything in the world that you encounter that is true or beautiful or draws you to God, these things are a gift. They are God being gracious to you and to all mankind.

Second, Paul tells us that God is There

I know that this is incredibly basic, but it would be irresponsible for me to skip it. In verse 19 we see that the way Paul leads off, he actually moves straight to saying that we know things about God. But the assumption prior to that is that we already know God. All of us. Even the most hardened atheist knows Him. We know

he is there. We know that he created us. And in the next verse Paul will say that we see these things about God “in the things that have been made.”

So the creation itself is a gift in which God gives all mankind perhaps the most precious thing that there is: knowledge of himself. We look at all that has been made, and we know there is a creator. Pagans and all of those who did not follow the God of Israel have known this from their earliest days that God is there.

Not only does Paul insist on it, which should be enough, but we see it from history as well. Not only do we see that all civilizations all over the world impulsively worship... often settling for manmade things, or false systems, but they have a clear desire to worship the creator, however confused they might be about him.

Even early philosophers and thinkers knew this as well.

Let me quote Peter Martyr, who summarizes this for us:

“When natural philosophers contemplate these things and observe their inherent properties and remarkable qualities, they are led to knowledge of God. For they know the order of causes and their connection with their effects. And, since they easily understand that an infinite progression cannot be maintained, they conclude that there is some first principle, and thus they conclude that God exists. Plato, Aristotle, and Galen taught this most beautifully.”

So he’s saying, “Look. Even these people who don’t have the Scriptures, and don’t believe in the Bible, saw and understood just what Paul is talking about here: God is there, he is a spirit, he is uncreated, and he is not physical.” They can see that only a creator can explain what we see and know of the world, that it must have begun with an unmovable and unmoved mover. Even the pagans were allowed to see this by God.

Third, I want you to notice that This Knowledge is a Privilege and a Gift to Be Used Rightly

In creation, God “continually sets before our eyes the open book of creation, constantly illuminating us and calling us to Himself” (Vermigli). Creation can be

compared to a book. It's a book with an author. It's a book with content. It tells us something. But it is a gift that's meant to be used in the right way.

Here's an example. Whenever we receive a covenant child in this church as a communing member, we give the new communing member a Bible. And the hope and plan of giving them that Bible is that they will put it to good use by reading it and being blessed by it. But how do you think we would feel if we found out that the Bible was being used to prop open a door, or to keep a window from closing? Or if we found out that it was being used to throw at people like a weapon? We would be very unhappy!

And that is God's own attitude when it comes to the book of nature. The revelation that he gives to us in creation really is meant to be used to lead us to worship him, and to rejoice in his glory, not to send us off into idolatry and invented forms of worship. And often people take this good gift that God has given, and they completely misuse it, and resist the sermon that creatio preaches to each and every one of us.

So that's the third thing I want you to see under this first point: This knowledge is a gift. It's a gift that was meant to be used to lead us to God.

2. Revelation of God's Nature

Now, our second point this morning is the Revelation of God's Nature.

This is a step beyond what we just saw a moment ago, because in our last point I mentioned that according to Paul everyone knows that God is there. But he says more than that. He also tells us that there are *things* that we can know about God from the book of nature – not just that he is there, but in some ways we can tell what He is *like*.

Okay, so what does Paul say that all people know? Well there are two categories of things that he mentions which every human being knows about God. Those two things that all people know are first, the eternal power of God, and second Paul says they know his divinity. Here is Peter Martyr again:

“From the very structure of this world, they understood that God is supremely powerful. Moreover, they could see from the beauty, order, and harmony of creation that such great power must have been governed by supreme wisdom and providence. They recognized the divine majesty of the Creator who rules all things, particularly in His goodness to all.”

Think of creation as a window through which we are shown something on the other side: And what is on the other side of the window of nature... is the creator. We know that he is there. We can see him through the window of creation.

Other passages of Scripture will cast even more light on this, I think. What do all people everywhere know?

First, all people everywhere know that God is good. How do they know he is good? Because of his providence. Because he provides for them. Listen to this from Acts 14:16-17:

“In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”

So there you see the Apostle saying, “God brought you rain and gave you fruitful seasons. He was showing you that he was good.” You can see the goodness of God all around simply by looking at his gifts. Do you enjoy the goodness of God in creation? Do you appreciate his goodness? Do you thank him for his evident goodness?

All people everywhere know not only that God exists, but they know his goodness. They’ve experienced it firsthand.

Second, they know that God is immanent – in other words, he is not distant or far away. Listen to Paul in Acts 17:24-27:

“The God who made the world and everything in it... gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation... that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.”

Third, they know that God is glorious. Listen to this from Psalm 97:6:

“The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory.”

The people of earth can tell that the God who hung the stars and placed them in the sky must be great, majestic, and glorious. This is an unmissable conclusion. We may resist it, but we cannot miss it. The Psalmist says, “all the peoples see his glory.”

Fourth, they are surrounded by this witness. Look at Job 12:7-9:

“But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you... Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?”

Fifth, according to Psalm 19:1-4, this testimony is universal and continual. The knowledge of God is not a one-time thing that happened at a certain moment in time but is constantly ongoing.

“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.”

Nobody can say, “Well you showed yourself to my grandfather but not to me. You showed yourself to Noah, but then you hid yourself.” No, God has always been there, and always shown himself to mankind.

Notice what Paul says in verse 19: “what can be known about God is plain to them.” Now, notice that Paul is incredibly careful with his language here: “what can be known about God” from nature is what they know. Nature tells us many things about God, but it doesn’t tell us *everything* about God. For example, nature cannot and will not tell you about forgiveness of sins in Christ. Nature doesn’t tell us about the promise of the resurrection of our bodies to eternal happiness. Nature doesn’t tell us about the Lord’s Supper.

I mention this because I want you to notice the limitations of what everyone knows. In nature we know all that can be known apart from special revelation. The book of nature is open to all of us. We all know enough to be condemned, no matter who we are or where we live, but no one on their own, apart from Special Revelation, knows enough to be saved.

Because salvation is more than just knowing that God exists, or even what he is like. Salvation is about knowing who *Jesus* is, and placing our faith in him, and coming to him in repentance.

And I do think the big question that might come up in your mind at this point is, “Okay, wait. God has revealed himself to everybody, but everybody doesn’t believe in him or follow him. So if he’s revealed himself to everyone, then what gives?” R.C. Sproul wrote a book a long time ago whose title perfectly encapsulates the issue. The book was called *If There’s a God, why Are There Atheists?*

Well keep going.

3. Rebellion Against God’s Truth

That brings us to the third point, which is rebellion against God’s truth.

Look at verse 18 again. Paul says that God’s wrath is revealed against “men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”

Everything that we just looked at was showing us that yes, in fact, everyone has the truth. Now he’s showing what happened to that truth. The truth is out there, the truth is real. It’s outside of us in the world, but it’s also inside of us as well. We have moral intuitions, we have consciences, we know right from wrong, and we often feel like we’ve done wrong, even though when we did it, we did what we want. Everything outside of us and inside of us points toward the glorious law-giver and creator. So why doesn’t everyone believe?

Paul’s answer is this word “suppression.” They have the truth, but they resist it, they prevent it, they hinder it from taking hold. They hold it down. In classical Greek literature we see illustrations of how this word is used. Herodotus, for

example, in his histories, talks about the Spartans and the battle of the Hot Gates, how the three hundred Spartans withstood the Persian army. And Herodotus uses the same word for the Spartans holding back the Persians that Paul uses here to say what sinners do to their knowledge of God. The Spartans – Herodotus says, suppressed the Persians. And Paul is saying that in a similar way, people also resist or suppress the knowledge of God which – like the Persian army – has all of mankind surrounded.

Remember: the thing they suppress isn't just a truth that is inside of them. It surrounds them. It testifies to them constantly.

And so Paul's point is that *nobody* gets to plead ignorance. He is in the business in the first two chapters of Romans here, of shooting down all kinds of excuses from everyone. In chapter two he'll be dealing with Jewish excuses. But for the rest of this chapter, chapter 1, he is shooting down Gentile or pagan excuses. Because he knows they're going to say, "Well we didn't have the advantages the Jews had. God didn't reveal himself to us!" They will think, in other words, that they have an excuser of ignorance.

Wrong! Paul says, he's spoken to you every day, all your life, in ways that you can see all around you. He's got you surrounded. His testimony is everywhere. It's in your eyes, in your ears, in your conscience... everywhere and in every way, God has been preaching and showing himself to you. You have no excuse. And then he explains the rebellion: it's a matter of the will. People simply don't want to believe. Why is self-deception such a real problem? We will talk about this more fully in a couple of weeks.

But okay, so here is a common question: what about the person who has never heard the gospel? What about the person out there who has never heard the name of Jesus? Is it possible that God just sort of gives them an out, gives them a pass since they didn't ever hear the name of Jesus?

This is a big question, and I'm determined to control myself when it comes to sermon length, so let me give you a simple, but far from exhaustive answer to that.

First of all, you need to know that the default position of every human being who has been born from Adam is that we are infected by original sin. Not only do we all sin, but we are all corrupted by sin's power. This includes people who have never heard the name of Jesus. Not having heard the name of Jesus does not change the reality that they are guilty of sin and will have to answer to God for what they've done. The sad reality though is that no one has yet taken them the gospel. But when God condemns them for their sin Paul is telling us here that they won't have an excuse because they knew that God is real and they knew what he was like and they still lived as his enemies. That's the first thing I want to mention, which is we need to remember that whether they've heard the gospel or not, they are still a sinner in need of a Savior.

Second, the assumption that the person who doesn't have the gospel deserves to have the gospel. The question assumes that everyone deserves to hear the name of Jesus. I'll grant you that God commands Christians to go into all the world, and so we should and we must tell all people everywhere about Jesus. But from God's perspective you must understand that he doesn't owe anyone the message of the Gospel. He desires to share it but he does not owe it. All people need the gospel, but that doesn't mean that anyone *deserves* the gospel.

I want to encourage you to see what God does and doesn't owe you. He owes you justice, he doesn't owe you grace. And if you have *ever* heard the gospel, you should see that as God's grace to you. When he did that for you, he wasn't giving you what deserved. He was giving you grace. Even hearing the name of Jesus is an act of God's grace! You aren't owed the name of Jesus. God doesn't have an obligation to tell you about the rescue of Jesus Christ. He doesn't owe you the gospel. And that is true of all the people in the world who stand guilty before God, and perhaps have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Third of all, while God does will for his gospel to be proclaimed through the world, he has willed to do it *through you and me*! Listen to this from Romans 10:

“For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are

sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:13-17 ESV)

General Revelation is clear enough to condemn, but it does not contain the gospel. And so mankind apart from the message of the gospel can and will be condemned, but not saved. If I might put it this way, the fact that God saves through the name of Jesus Christ is a motivation to you and me, that we should be sharing it. That’s what Paul is doing there in Romans 10. He’s saying why we should be excited to share Jesus. Faith comes from hearing. Are you speaking the gospel to others? Are you motivated to make sure that on the last day your friends and neighbors would be able to say, “I thank God that she told me about Jesus. I thank God that she didn’t keep the good news to herself”?

But let me say something else. Maybe you can see in your own heart that you’ve been resisting your own knowledge of God. Perhaps you can see that your own need is even more fundamental.

I want to end with this word from Paul that we just read: “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Will you do that today? Either for the first time, or for the thousandth time? We all need to keep repenting and keep believing.

You’ve resisted, perhaps, you’ve suppressed the truth. But maybe even right now God could be using this message to make you realize: the problem hasn’t been with God. It’s not that he hasn’t shown himself to you. It’s not that he hasn’t given you enough. He’s been quite clear with you. He’s shown himself to you. He’s surrounded you with testimony about himself on every side all day long for your entire life. And yet you’ve resisted the truth. You’ve suppressed the truth.

But here you are now, and you have this incredible privilege. Right now. You’re hearing the good news. This is for all of us to hear, of course. But will you turn to him. Call on the name of the Lord. Stop resisting. Stop suppressing. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.

Let's pray.