



Is God Fair to Judge People When They Don't Have Bibles?

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen (How?) **through the things he has made**. So they are without excuse" (Romans 1:18-20). Remember, though these words eventually did become part of the New Testament they were actually spoken **before there was a written N.T.** They have never been "out of play."

Will people who have not heard the gospel be judged? And if they are judged, what will be the basis of that judgement? Why should missionaries go to far away places to teach people about Christ? Won't they be saved anyway?

Our passage indicates that perhaps people know more than they let on; it also indicates that they could know more if they wanted to. It tells us that truth is "held down" or "suppressed" by their unrighteousness. The truth that they hold down is both internal, that is in their conscience, and external, --that is, it is also seen in the external universe --the creation.

Here is the story: Paul is saying that some people promote the idea that there is no God --yet, they hold truth about themselves and the external universe. That is, there is something there. Why? And where did it come from? It is also an orderly something. Why? These are questions that neither Albert Einstein nor Charles Darwin could answer. In addition, we are always in quest of something more. No matter how much we find in the universe, we always know that there is something more. No matter how much we know, there is always something more to find out about. We call that transcendency. Only humans have transcendency, because humans are "created in the image of God." Still, we will not find all there is to find, until we find God. But, we do admit infinity and eternity.

Here is the problem, they refuse to bring these truths about themselves and the external creation to a logical conclusion **because these truths contradict, they militate against**, their contention of "no God." If there were a God, they might have to live differently, they might have to behave differently --and they're not about to. So, the next best thing is to "hold down," to "suppress" the truth in order that they not have to give up living the way they do. That is the meaning of the phrase "they hold down the truth by their unrighteousness." Truth requires certain moral/ethical standards. So then, they must hold some truths about themselves and the universe, for they live in the universe as God made it. However, they refuse to carry these truths to their reasonable conclusion --which is, there is a God. They see a moth with a geometric configuration of its outer wing and a perfect heart-shape on its inner wing, and they think it is luck. Would they think that about a stained glass window in a church?

So, Paul continues in verses 21, and 22. He says, people have become vain (foolish, empty) in their reasoning, their hearts have been darkened, and they have become foolishly foolish --holding positions that disagree with what actually exists. It was Albert Einstein who said in a New York Times interview late in his life, "The more I study science, the more I believe in God."

In age after age, people who had the truth deliberately threw it away. I suspect wanting to get rid of God so that they could "do unto others as they well pleased." After all, the world is what it is, not as a result of the cruelty of God to people, but as a result of the cruelty of people to people. "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen" (Romans 1:24, 25).

People have all kinds of explanations for moral problems. According to our passage it is doctrinal diversion, first (no God), that produces, secondly, moral diversion. What you believe affects the way you behave. In other words, "out with truth, in with moral problems." Can we not see that, even within the church, with a transparent clarity?

Paul repeats the idea three times 1:23-24; 1:25-27; and from verse 28 onward. It is as though he is saying, "Notice it, and notice it well, you have not misread --it is because people turn away from God that moral problems arise." By the way, shouldn't that be a clue to the church? The way to bring people to morality is to bring them to Christ --it is not to pass more rules, of which they have no heart to obey, and will simply refuse to obey. Even if they obey them under duress, does that make them any different than what they are?

This message is of special importance to sociologists, psychologists, ethics classes, philosophy classes, and political science classes, for it is imperative that we do not focus on the minor, secondary causes as to why people behave badly --or simply be caught talking about the symptoms. It is this, "They turn from God, then, and because of that, moral problems come."

I think one of the greatest examples of an attempt to explain unacceptable human behavior by means of genetic determinism (that is, the idea that ones' genetics make one like a train on a track --unable to go to the right or the left), involves Richard Speck, the man who killed eight nurses in Chicago. His psychologist wrote a book saying that Speck could no more keep from killing them than another man could keep from sneezing.

This view raises some serious questions.

First, it makes the nurses' lives worth zero. Yet, it is the abandonment of God the creator that makes such a view possible. Without God, man is, after all, just another animal. People don't matter; they become tiger food and that is all. Without God, there is nothing to lift man above the animals.

Second, what about society? If we will say God has set up a moral order, then who is to say what that order is? It was Jesus who taught, "Treat others the way you want them to treat you." It was Jesus (God) who said "treat others the way you what them to treat you" --we, on the other hand have always said, "I refuse to help people who do not appreciate my help." We haven't made it to Jesus with that!

Thirdly, the abandonment of God the creator, in favor of random chance, dehumanizes people. We need to be saying, "You were created in the image of God; therefore, you can choose and you are responsible for your choice."

There is a tendency to explain sin lightly and to think that such an explanation is somehow humanitarian -- but it isn't. It decreases the importance of, and significance of mankind to say that he or she has no ability to make a difference --has no ability to choose. If men cannot choose, then they are little more than nothing.

Paul repeats it again in the 25th verse "Who exchange the truth of God for a lie, and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator." Paul was thinking of gods of silver and gold, and stone and, also the worship of the universe, or any part of it. Even on the basis of what they knew themselves, as men and women, to be, they should

have known better. Isaiah wrote, "Aren't you silly to make gods that are less than yourself. You must carry them; they don't carry you." --Obviously, Isaiah hadn't seen our wonderful automobiles. However, they do end in the junkyard far too soon.

Is it not silly to worship something that is less than you, yourself, are? **And knowing yourself**, isn't it silly to worship yourself?

Paul continues: In verse 26, there is hostility between the genders. So that many women are no longer comfortable with men, and visa-versa. That is "men working with men, women working with women." They find one another to be a threat. It is because they are a threat!

Instead of understanding and reconciliation, which would be Christ's solution --they stick with their bitterness; they stay mad, and they stay apart. I think that very little of it is sexual --that is only a symptom of a much more serious hostility. It is also clear to me that much of the church itself has worked tirelessly to enforce the idea that men are somehow superior to women --and must dominate them. So, they have to have separate groups --men working with men, women working with women. You end up with a "tree house" and a sign saying "No girl allowed" --then grow up saying "Let's be kind --but, let's not be fair." It doesn't seem much like "there is no longer male or female, bond or free, Jew nor Greek, you are all one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28). Personally, I want everybody on the Christian stage --I want all four parts of the Christian choir.

The third repetition of "out with God, in with moral problems" is given in verses 28-31. "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, **they are gossips**, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents (why not? Listen to their parents talk --Well, they do listen to their parents talk.), foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless." Christians cannot buy into any of this and hope to remain Christian. To throw out God is to settle for "a mind void of judgement" (vr. 28), or "empty of reasoning" as we had it in (vrs 21-22).

So then, two questions arise: First, are people like this to be judged if they have no Bibles? Secondly, is it fair to judge them?

First, let it be clear that this person has not suppressed the special revelation that is in the Bible, but the *internal revelation* of conscience and the *external revelation* of creation. He or she holds some truth about self and some truth about the universe; the problem is, that these truths are not brought to a reasonable conclusion --which is, there is a God.

It is after that, that a breakdown in morality occurs. We are apt to say, "They didn't know." God says, "They did know." "They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die --yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them" (Romans 1:32). The answer to the first question is, "Yes, they are going to be judged."

The second question is, "Is it fair?" If you have ever talked to people, you immediately know the question deserves consideration. Is God just in judging the person without a Bible? We read in Romans 1:32 - 2:3) "Who knowing the judgment of God." Think about what is being said here. Here are the majority of people scattered all over the world. Their ancestors have turned away from the truth and this generation is unaware of it. There was a time when "they knew God" (Romans 1:21) --not them, but their ancestors.

However, they still have the powerful testimony of the fact that their own godless philosophical system does not sufficiently explain "what is" --It does not explain the existence and form of the universe, or the uniqueness of humanity. "They are ever learning, and never able to come to the 'bottom of it all' (the truth)!" (2 Timothy 3:7)..

In addition, all people have moral motions --even people who, by theory, do not believe in morality. These people will still tell you what their neighbors, or the government did wrong. Although the standard of moral judgment may be different than that of the Bible, moral judgments are constantly being made by people without the Bible. For example, the harlot will think it is wrong to leave without paying, and so forth.

"Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself because you, the judge, are doing the very same things" (Romans 2:1-3). Matthew 7:1-2 says, "Judge not for with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged." Now, judgment in tastes doesn't count. However, when ever you hold another to the words of *right* or *wrong*, **God will take your own words and play them back to you**. He will let you set the standard; how well have you done by your own standard?

O yes, here is where my opponent was wrong --now, how about you? Here is where you said your neighbor was wrong --now, how about you. You say, "He shouldn't have deducted that" --Then God says, "let me have a look at *your* income tax returns. You say, "Why did they buy that new car, when their children need so many things or the poor are in need, or the missionaries could have used it?" God says, "Well now... how did you spend your money?"

The point is, everyone comes up silent. No person in all the world has kept the moral standard with which he or she has tried to hold others. Consequently, God says, "I will judge you upon your own moral statements; even if they are lower than moral statements ought to be" --we don't need a Bible for that. Guilty or not? Not one voice will be raised. The entire world will stand guilty before God in justice and fairness. Why? Because they will not be judged upon what they have not known, but upon what they have known, and have not kept. All people must say, "Indeed, I am justly guilty."

Paul continues with the concept, "They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all" (Rom. 2:15-16). Jesus said, "But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by *your own words* you shall be justified, & by *your own words* you shall be condemned" (Matt 12:36).

People will not be condemned by God's Word, but by their own words. Is that fair? What could be *more* fair? It is fair, but I don't want to take a chance of that. I don't want to hear what I have said, then compare it with what I have done. That is what the cross is about. When God comes into the picture, so does grace. When Christ comes into the picture, so does forgiveness. I don't want God to judge me; I want him to have mercy on me. That, folk, is why Phariseeism in Christianity, doesn't sell well to the world --they know that we are not near perfect --we're just forgiven. Do not claim more.

I want to end by saying, "But God didn't send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17). "He that believes on the Son has everlasting life: and he that does not believe on the Son shall not see life; but the judgment of God is on him." Thank God for the cross. No one can afford to go without the cross. The cross it not a fetish; it is not a charm --it is the way we must live. There is a reminder of that on the top of our steeple that points upward toward God. Christians must become the "up" people again.