

Truth Suppressed

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[0 : 00] I want you to open your Bibles to Romans chapter 1.

We're going to be in chapter 1 for at least a few more weeks. We've been here for a while. We're not rushing through Romans. There's no need to rush through the book of Romans. There's too much here for us to move quickly and miss some things.

So we're going to spend some time in Romans. We're spending time in chapter 1. This morning we're in verses 18 through 20 again. And so as you turn there, I want you to stand and we'll read together.

Romans chapter 1, verses 18 through 20. The Apostle Paul writes, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. 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.

[1 : 17] So they are without excuse. We give you thanks for these words and for all the words that surround them. And we trust that You're going to speak to us through Your Spirit.

We pray in Christ's name. Amen. You guys take a seat. Last week we spent some time in these verses, particularly in verse 18, where we zeroed in on this term unrighteousness.

And we talked about what unrighteousness is in the context of the New Testament, in particular of the book of Romans, and then even more specifically in Romans 1 through 3.

And I said to you that unrighteousness is at its base, at its core, it is a refusal to honor and give thanks and worship God and give Him the glory that He rightly deserves.

Unrighteousness is not merely a failure to live up to some sort of external standard. There are external standards. There are standards given to us in the Bible. We all know and are familiar with the Ten Commandments, even if you don't have them memorized.

[2 : 21] You could probably at least quote a few of them or paraphrase a few of them. We're familiar with the Ten Commandments. But what do the Ten Commandments do? The Ten Commandments immediately began to point us toward the issue of worshiping only God.

No images, no idols the commandments tell us. We can't bow down or worship anything or anyone other than God Himself. And so we're brought back. Even when we look at the Bible's list of commandments, we're still brought back to this fundamental principle that righteousness is giving to God the honor and glory that He deserves, and unrighteousness is refusing to give to God the glory that He deserves.

It's refusing to render to Him the worship that rightly belongs to Him. And the Apostle Paul says that the wrath of God goes against all the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men.

And we said last week that this is a universal problem. Because in Romans chapter 1, the Apostle Paul is giving a description of all of humanity. This is not just a description of an isolated group of people that happens to be worse than everyone else in the world.

Romans chapter 1, 18 through verse 32 are about the entire world. And then as you turn to Romans chapter 2, He doesn't move to another subject. He just narrows down the parameters.

[3 : 42] He's still discussing unrighteousness when you get to Romans chapter 2, but instead of talking about the whole world, He begins to narrow down the parameters to those who would consider themselves to be religious.

Those who might lay claim to a righteousness of their own. And He begins to dismantle that in chapter 2 before you get midway through chapter 2 in verse 12. And He turns His attention specifically to the Jewish people.

And He begins to address their claims to righteousness. And He breaks those down until you get all the way down in the middle of chapter 3 where He says in verse 9, what, are we, Jews, any better off than the Gentiles?

And He says, no, because we've already charged that everyone, Jews and Greeks alike, are under sin. That is, we have proven, He says, through these words, that both Jews and Gentiles, that is, everybody, is in the category of unrighteous.

That's everyone on the face of the earth. All of us are unrighteous. All of us have failed or refused to give to God the honor and glory that rightly belongs to Him and to Him alone.

[4 : 51] But there's one thing that I didn't mention about unrighteousness last week that is mentioned in verse 18 and that I want us to spend some time on this morning. He says at the end of verse 18 that we upon whom the wrath of God is being revealed, the unrighteous, that we, by our unrighteousness, suppress the truth.

unrighteousness has the effect everywhere and at all times of suppressing the truth. And this is not something that we only see here in Romans chapter 1.

We see it really throughout Paul's writings. There is this connection between unrighteousness and the truth throughout the writings of Paul. You can see it. Just turn over one page in your Bibles to Romans chapter 2.

Where he talks about in verse 8, those who are self-seeking and do not, he says, they do not obey the truth, but instead they obey unrighteousness.

He says for them there will be wrath and fury. So the opposite of obeying the truth is obeying unrighteousness. It's the same sort of connection. Or you can turn all the way over to 1 Corinthians chapter 13, which is one of the most famous chapters in all of the New Testament, certainly in all of the Apostle Paul's writings.

[6 : 08] The love chapter. But in the middle of the love chapter, in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, verse 6, we are told that love does not rejoice at wrongdoing.

Now pause, because that word wrongdoing is the same word in Romans chapter 1 and chapter 2. It's there translated unrighteousness. So, love does not rejoice at unrighteousness, but instead rejoices at the truth.

So, you have in Romans chapter 2, obeying the truth as opposed to obeying unrighteousness. And here in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, rejoicing at the truth as opposed to rejoicing at unrighteousness.

One more passage. I want you to see this connection. There are a few more, but we'll look at one more passage. 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, where the Apostle Paul is in a discussion of end times.

There's a lot of difficult things in this chapter. We're not going to zero in on all those difficult things. I just want you to see one thing that he says in this chapter. We'll start in verse 9. 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 9.

[7 : 13] Paul speaks of the coming of the lawless one. He says that it is by the activity of Satan, with all power and false signs and wonders. And here it is. And this lawless one will come in verse 10, with all unrighteous, yes, he says wicked, but all unrighteous deception for those who are perishing because they have refused to love the truth and so be saved.

So in 1 Corinthians 13, love is exemplified by rejoicing in the truth, but now love for the truth results in being saved. And the opposite of love for the truth is being influenced by unrighteous lies or unrighteous deception.

And then he does it again in verse 11. Therefore, God sends them a strong delusion so that they may believe what is false in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

So over and over, obedience to the truth as opposed to obedience to unrighteousness, rejoicing in the truth as opposed to rejoicing in unrighteousness, and now believing in the truth as opposed to believing in unrighteousness.

Unrighteousness is always coupled with a disdain and a rejection of the truth in the New Testament. And Paul tells us specifically in chapter 1 what the nature of the relationship is between our sinfulness or our unrighteousness and the truth.

[8 : 43] And he says that it is our unrighteousness is what causes us to suppress the truth. Literally, the word there is to hold down the truth.

It's there. It exists. It's not that we are unknowledgeable of the truth. The truth is revealed equally in this sense, this truth.

We all see it. We all know it. It's there to be seen by everyone on the face of the earth. And yet, universally, unrighteousness leads us to suppress and hold down the truth. You might think to yourself, well, I'm not sure about that because aren't there truths that virtually everyone agrees to?

Is there not truth in the world that we do not suppress? I mean, it's universally true and pretty much universally acknowledged that 2 plus 2 equals 4. That's the truth.

That's not a lie. It's truth. And we're not denying it. So how can the Apostle Paul say that unrighteousness leads to the suppression of the truth? Because he has in mind a specific set of truths, a specific kind of truth that he defines for us in the following verses.

[9 : 55] Look at verse 19. Here's the truth that we suppress by or in our unrighteousness. For what can be known about God is plain to them or evident to them because God has shown it to them.

So the truth that's being suppressed universally is truth about God. It's not truth in general. There are still broad truths about the physical world around us that we all acknowledge and that we all accept.

In fact, we can move a step beyond that and say that there are moral truths that are universally acknowledged around the world.

That is undeniable both from a practical, observational standpoint and from a biblical standpoint. In fact, if you look in chapter 2 of Romans, Paul talks about those who though they do not have the law become a law unto themselves.

Look at verse 12. This is not on the screen. I didn't tell Kay about it. Sorry, Kay. For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

[11 : 01] For it's not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God but the doers of the law. For with Gentiles who do not have the law by nature do what the law requires. They are a law to themselves even though they do not have the law.

They show the work of the law written on their hearts. So there are basic moral principles embodied in the law of Moses that we see particularly in the Ten Commandments that are written upon the hearts of all men.

You will not find a society anywhere that openly says murder is okay. You will find societies that justify murder and that will classify things that we would classify as murder as not murder.

And so if you're caught in the middle of Syria and Iraq right now and you're seeing thousands of people be brutally massacred and you look at the people that are killing them and you say, why are you murdering them?

They say, we're not murdering them. We're not. This is their just penalty for their disobedience. But even though that's the case, if they were to classify something as murder, then there would be some sort of judicial penalty for it.

[12 : 09] Because we recognize around the world in every culture, however murder might be dismissed sometimes in various cultures, nevertheless, it's universally recognized as wrong.

Because there are certain moral truths engraved upon the human heart as those who are created in the image of God. So that truth can be seen in the observable world.

Truth can be seen even written upon the human heart. Truth about the physical world. Certain moral truths engraved upon our heart. And those aren't the truths that Paul is talking about here in Romans chapter 1.

That's not the truth that he says we are suppressing. No, he says we are suppressing truth about God Himself. All of us.

Everyone on the planet. Everyone who has ever lived on the planet. Has suppressed the truth about God. And he gets more specific than that.

[13 : 08] He helps us to know exactly what truth it is that we suppress. Verse 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 he says that what we are suppressing is knowledge that we have about God's invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, and we gain that knowledge as God reveals it to us in the created world around us.

Now when he says that these things have been visible to us ever since the creation of the world, or when he says that they are perceived clearly in the things that have been made, we shouldn't stop, we shouldn't begin to think, oh, that means that it's an automatic thing.

That we ought to be able to look at the physical world around us and immediately say, oh, God exists. That's not the argument that Paul is making. What Paul is saying here is that in those things, God is actively revealing Himself to all of humanity.

Notice how it's worded. He says in verse 19, what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. God is showing these things to us through the world that He has made and we are suppressing that truth.

[14 : 33] What truths exactly? Eternal power and divine nature. So that at the very least, God is revealing to us through the created order that He is sovereign, that He possesses all power.

Because if a being has the ability to create an entire universe, then he must be all-powerful. If you trace causation back to what philosophers often call the first cause, alright?

If you trace causation back, then you have to arrive at something or someone that is able to cause everything else to come into existence.

This is power. This is unlimited, omnipotent power. And God reveals through the created world that a God of unlimited power is responsible for all of it.

And in fact, that that God Himself and His power are everlasting. They are, in fact, eternal. So, already we see, as God reveals in the creation around us, we can see that God is both omnipotent, all-powerful, and that He's eternal or everlasting.

[15 : 46] But then He adds this phrase, deity, or divine nature. And you think, well, what does He mean by that? Wouldn't that already include everlasting, eternal, omnipotent power?

Probably so. But I think when Paul uses it here in this verse, he has something else in mind. I think what Paul has in mind here is that if this everlasting, omnipotent God does exist, and we acknowledge Him as divine, we acknowledge His deity, then by acknowledging His godhood, His deity, we are acknowledging that He is, in fact, worthy of all the honor and glory and thanks that we are refusing to give to Him.

I mean, that is a major theme throughout this chapter. The honor and glory that God Himself deserves because He is God.

Verse 21, although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks. Verse 23, they exchanged the glory of the immortal God. Verse 25, they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the Creator rather than the Creator.

Notice there. It's a refusal to worship God as Creator that's being attacked here. It's not the refusal to worship God as Redeemer. It's as Creator.

[17 : 05] So, God, simply as God, with eternal everlasting power, who has created all things outside of Himself, because of that, is automatically deserving of honor, glory, and worship.

That's what it means to be the Creator. And we, in our unrighteousness, in our refusal to give Him the honor and glory and worship that He deserves, we run to the one refuge we have.

Deny it all. It's not true. Shut your eyes. It's just not true. We're like frightened little children watching a scary movie.

And we close our eyes and hope that the movie just stops when we close our eyes as if it's not happening on the screen anymore. But it's still happening.

It's still going on. You open your eyes, it's still there. This is not a movie. This is God Himself revealing Himself in creation and saying to us, You owe Me all worship, honor, glory, and praise.

[18 : 21] And Your delight and happiness and joy will only be found when you do what you were made to do. But we're sinners.

But we are unrighteous. And so we suppress the truth that God makes known about Himself every day in the created world. Now, probably, I think there are two different ways of suppressing this truth, of denying the truth that we see here.

There is, of course, the most obvious way, the way mentioned in Psalm 53 where He says, The fool has said in his heart, there is no God. There is the way of the atheist that simply just outright says, there is no God.

At all. God does not exist. That certainly would be a suppression of the truth that God reveals about Himself in the created order because at that point you're denying that a Creator even exists in any form at all.

And so there's that, but I don't think that that's where Paul primarily has his sights set. I mean, the reality is very few of us in here, if any of us, are really close to any atheists.

[19 : 35] I mean, you might work with an atheist, you might have a family member who says that they're an atheist, but very few of us in here would be able to claim to have a very close personal relationship with an atheist.

And the reason for that is obvious. They're few and far between. They're few and far between. There are not, even in our world today, there are not just multitudes and multitudes of atheists in the world today.

There just aren't. Oh, they're there and you can find them and you can certainly find them on the internet. You can certainly find their books at Barnes & Noble that atheists are out there, okay? They're not some sort of rare creature that you never see, but we're not surrounded by atheists.

And the Apostle Paul was not surrounded by atheists, though they existed in the world in which he lived. And so, his primary target is not the atheists. That's not who he's talking about primarily here, although this would apply to them.

No, there's another way in which we suppress the truth revealed by God in the created order. And that is that we acknowledge that this world was created, and yet, we attribute that work to someone or something other than God.

[20 : 49] And then we take the honor and glory that God rightly deserves, and we give it to that someone or something. That's exactly what he tells us here.

He doesn't simply say that we refuse to worship God. He says that we exchange the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

He doesn't simply say that we don't worship God. He says that we worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator. That's what we do. That's the primary way in which human beings suppress the truth that God is revealing about Himself in all the world.

Now, we don't always do it in as obvious of ways. I mean, Paul was living in a world in which in every major city just about, there were massive temples built to false gods with massive stone statues that people literally bowed down to and worshipped all the time.

And there are places in the world that are still like that. Go to India, you will see these amazingly beautiful structures, but they are fully devoted over to the worship of images and idols.

[21 : 59] So, you will find this in the world today. We're not as familiar with this. We don't often carve out images and then bow down to them. What we prefer to do instead is to fashion a God of our own liking in our minds that is not the God revealing Himself in all of creation.

It's a God who fits the pattern that will not disturb our lifestyle. We will fashion a God who will not condemn the things that we love, who will praise the things that we love.

We will fashion and form in our own minds and mold a God after our own likeness. Still, worshipping and serving created things rather than the Creator.

And the Apostle Paul says, all of that, all of that suppression of the truth of God is due to our unrighteousness. Now, I imagine that there could be two possible objections at this point to what Paul is saying and what I'm saying here.

You could, on the one hand, you could argue that surely there is some people in the world who have a right knowledge of God, religious people who receive the revelation that God reveals in creation and they're good religious people and they worship a single solitary God and surely those people would not fall under the category that Paul is describing here.

[23 : 41] Surely they're not suppressing the truth. To which Paul says in chapter 2 verse 1, Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges, for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourselves, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.

He says, we know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. What things? He lists a group of sins at the end of chapter 1 that seem to belong to this category of truth suppressors and idol worshipers and now he turns his attention to the religious and says, but you don't have an excuse either religious people.

Simply because you haven't built an idol, simply because you claim to live by certain standards, because you claim to believe in God, Paul says, no, your practices reveal the truth about you.

Verse 2, we know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man, you judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?

Paul says, the quote-unquote religious man, yet in his heart, still practices the very things that he is condemning in the heathen out there in the world.

[25 : 06] In other words, as he says in chapter 3, verse 10, there is no one righteous. There is no one righteous.

They don't exist. The religious are just as unrighteous as the irreligious. And if you want to get more specific, he does get more specific. He addresses specifically the Jewish people because at least they have the true revelation of God in the Torah and the prophets.

At least they have that. I mean, they're not like the adherents of Islam who though worshipping one God, yet follow the writings of a false prophet that make all sorts of statements about that one God that just do not fit with the true revelation of God.

At least the Jewish people have the Scriptures. At least they have the truth about God. Verse 17, But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know His will and approve what is excellent because you're instructed from the law, if you're sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor to the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge of truth, you then who teach others.

Do you not teach yourself while you preach against stealing? Do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.

[26 : 30] For as it is written, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you. And then he says, I think, in verse 26, what is the most important thing here with regard to these religious Jews.

So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law.

For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly nor is circumcision outward and physical but a Jew is one inwardly. Circumcision is a matter of the heart by the spirit not by the letter.

In other words, Paul is saying, unrighteousness cannot be eradicated by looking at your physical descent or merely your outward behavior.

real righteousness, real connection and relationship with the Creator of the world is a matter of the heart.

[27 : 37] And we all have failed the heart test. All of us. there is no religious man who on his own apart from the grace of God fully obeys the law and fully worships and loves God with all of his heart.

They don't exist. Second objection I might imagine is you might say, but perhaps there is the individual or perhaps there is the isolated tribe somewhere in the world that has responded to the revelation of God in creation and arrived at a belief in an all-powerful, eternal God who is worthy of their worship.

Perhaps there is someone somewhere or some group of people somewhere that have accomplished that feat and therefore they have not suppressed the truth of God as He is revealing in creation.

Do they exist? I would say first off on the one hand that they don't exist. Romans chapter 3 verse 10 None is righteous, no, not one.

No one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside. They don't exist. This mythical tribesman who worships God purely as He's revealed in nature just doesn't exist.

[29 : 19] What if they did exist? What if there was someone who responded to this revelation? What then?

What then? What then? Would it be enough? It wouldn't be adequate. It wouldn't be adequate because the revelation of God in the created world is sufficient to condemn us because we all reject it.

But it is not sufficient to save us because we are all sinners. You see, what you need is not an acknowledgement of God as He reveals Himself in the created order.

You need to see Him, acknowledge Him, and then you still need to be redeemed from your sins that set His wrath against you. So, even if the mythical tribesman, contrary to Romans 3, did exist, He would still be a sinner and still be in need of a Redeemer.

the revelation of God in the created order is sufficient to condemn, but it is not sufficient to save us.

[30 : 40] In fact, the revelation of God in the created order is aimed to show us of our universal need for a Redeemer.

If you don't acknowledge the universal condemnation of mankind through His revelation in the created order, then you can arrive at a flawed logic that I have heard over and over from many theologians and pastors.

And it goes like this. That a person is not judged or condemned by God until someone comes to them and tells them about God.

Or a person, they would say, maybe put it this way, a person is not condemned for rejecting Jesus until someone comes and tells them about Jesus.

To which I would reply with two things. Number one, from a practical standpoint, if that's true, then stop the missionary enterprise.

[31 : 53] Call them all back. Huddle up. And do not send them out to condemn people to hell. Why would they go if everywhere they go, they're bringing the possibility of condemnation for those who reject the message when that condemnation wasn't already there before they arrived.

So stop the missionary enterprise if Romans 1 is not true. Bring them home. Don't be cruel to people. It's a practical effect. But biblically, biblically, what do we say to that?

Biblically, we say, from Romans chapter 1, that this suppression of the truth is, in fact, universal.

We come into this world as sinners. Romans chapter 5 will teach us when we get there in about eight years. It will teach us about original sin. And it will show us why we all come into the world as sinners.

Romans 1 is merely dealing with the world as it exists full of people who come into the world as sinners. sinners. But because we are sinners, we all naturally reject the truth that God reveals about Himself.

[33 : 15] And God reveals that truth about Himself so that when the Gospel does arrive, we will have some foothold by which to understand the Gospel.

when a missionary shows up to a place where there has been no, no biblical knowledge at all, where the Scriptures have never been brought, never proclaimed, the name of Jesus is no different than the name Bob to anybody there.

It means nothing to them. Where do they start? they always start in Genesis 1 with creation because it's easy to say, you see that tree over there?

Now you suppose that it was made by whatever. But look at that tree. How could this, whatever you've imagined, how could it possibly do that?

Look above the tree. Look at the stars. Where do these things come from? There's a foothold. There's a place to start. And as the missionary begins to do that, he's not doing it by the powers of reason.

[34 : 30] He's directing their eyes to the revelation of God in creation. A foothold is there for the Gospel. And now the Gospel can be preached and proclaimed.

And yet, there is another effect of the revelation of God in nature.

And it's at the end of verse 20. So they are all humanity. They are without excuse.

There will be no one on judgment day who is able to say, but I didn't know. God will say, what you did know, you rejected.

But I never heard about Jesus. That's true. But I showed you myself. You rejected the little bit that I gave you.

[35 : 33] There will be no excuse left for any person on judgment day. Which means that for you and I, the task of taking the Gospel to the world around us becomes not just an important thing, not just something that we feel that we ought to do.

It becomes an imperative that we must do. We are not taking a message of encouragement to a world that is despondent. We are taking a message of redemption and salvation to a world that already stands under the wrath and condemnation of God.

The world around us, everywhere that we look, is under the wrath and condemnation of God. There is no hidden corner where God's wrath does not hang over those people because they deserve it.

So if you believe these verses, the preaching of the Gospel becomes imperative and absolutely necessary.

And then you begin to understand why it is throughout history that men and women have been willing to give up their lives, to lay down their lives and die of things like malaria and beheadings in places far away from home and away from everything familiar.

[37 : 07] Because they understood this, those people in those places have no hope and no excuse if we do not bring to them the Gospel.

because what unrighteous people need is righteousness. And the only righteousness that counts before God is the righteousness of Jesus Christ credited to all those who trust in Him.

And you cannot trust in one of whom you have never heard. I think