

WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER HEARD? Romans 1:18-32

Int: What will happen to the untold millions of people who live and die untold, never having seen a Bible or heard the name of Jesus? Paul came to grips with this question in this passage. He pictured a courtroom into which first-century pagans came before God the judge. The divine verdict? They are utterly inexcusable (1:20). This judgment holds whether those untold are savages or sophisticates, whether they live in Africa or America, and whether they wear loin cloths or academic garb.

Paul offered three basic statements in answer to the question.

GOD SHOWS HIMSELF TO ALL MEN

Those without the Holy Bible have another bible because God has revealed himself in the created order (1:20). The Oldest Testament is bound with the covers of day and night, its pages are heaven and earth, and its print is stars and suns, plants and animals, flowers and trees. Creation does not provide the key to its own existence. That there is something instead of nothing points to a Creator.

From the world *above*, the world *about*, and the world *within* a person with no other source of knowledge can learn of God's eternal power and divine nature.

MOST MEN SHUN GOD

It is not a question of *how much about God a man can know from creation but what a man does with the God-knowledge which comes that way!* Most people in this day as well as that remain in self-chosen darkness. They reject the God about whom they know something (1:19-20). To face the fact of God would be to admit they are accountable to him. So ancient and modern pagans drive that truth out of their consciousness and turn to worship the created instead of the Creator (1:23)!

FOR THIS THEY SUFFER GOD'S WRATH

Anybody who rejects God stands under God's wrath. Here the wrath of God is a present penalty that seems to consist in affirming men's bad choice and abandoning them to its consequences. "God gave them up!" (1:24, 26, 28).

The apostle traced the outworking of divine wrath in two directions.

PERSONAL ROT (1:24-27). When God gives up a man to his sin, the man's character decays. Paul illustrated this rot with the sin of homosexual behavior. He said harsh things about it. It is "a shameful lust" (1:26), "unnatural" (1:26), "an indecent act" (1:27), and "a perversion" (1:27). But this sin is just an example of moral degeneration. A person may start with good moral character but when he rejects what he knows of God he steps on a toboggan slide to hell!

SOCIAL ROT (1:28-32). These twenty-one "ancient wrongs with a modern ring" are the kinds of sins which mark the God-abandoned. Men against God are men against each other. They cannot put together a stable society. That they cannot is proof of God's wrath.

Con. Here is the question for this congregation. If God holds people responsible who have no Bible and never heard of Jesus, how much more will he hold accountable those who have (Luke 12:47-48).