

“Suppressing the Truth”
Romans 1:18-20
(Preached at Trinity, April 1, 2007)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we saw last week, God has clearly revealed Himself to Humanity.
Romans 1:20 – “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.”
2. God has clearly revealed Himself.
 - In His wrath – “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.”
 - He has clearly revealed Himself in our inner most being – in our conscience, in our longing for something beyond ourselves.
Romans 1:19 – “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them.”
Augustine writes in his *Confessions* – “*You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you*”
 - He has clearly revealed His power and divine existence in Creation
Romans 1:20 – “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.”
3. When people refuse to acknowledge and worship God the problem is not the lack of evidence for His existence. It is in our own resolute determination not to know Him.
4. The last phrase of **Verse 18** describes the great tragedy of it all.
 - A. God has been pleased to come down and reveal Himself to men. **Verse 18** says God has revealed His indignation over sin. **Verses 19-20** states further that God has revealed Himself in His glory so that all men are left without excuse.
 - B. The great tragedy is that while God has made the truth known clearly, lost humanity suppresses it – they pretend it isn’t there.
5. The last phrase in the KJV reads, “who hold the truth in unrighteousness;”
The word for “hold” is *κατεχόντων* from the word *κατέχω*.
 - A. It can be used to simply denote holding on to something. For example:
Hebrews 10:23 – “Let us hold fast the profession of *our* faith without wavering”
The problem with that translation here is men are not holding on to the truth. In fact they reject the truth.
Romans 1:25 – “Who changed the truth of God into a lie”
Romans 2:8 – “. . . do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness”
 - B. This word can also be used another way. It is a compound word made up of the word *ἔχω* which means to hold, and *κατὰ* which means down. It means to “hold down” or more clearly, “to suppress” which is the way we are to translate it here as we find in the ESV, NAS, NIV, and NKJV
 - C. These unrighteous men are not “holding” the truth but “suppressing” the truth.

6. God has revealed His Himself, His rule, His Law, His wrath – yet the lost man suppresses it.

This morning, however, I want to look at great tragedy that while God has been merciful to reveal Himself, men suppress the truth. Why do men suppress the truth of God?

- I. Because of the blindness of their own heart – depravity

Ephesians 4:17-18 – “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:”

- A. The corruption of our heart leads us to reject God’s claim upon us

1. Paul says, “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

- a. It is because of their unrighteousness that they suppress the truth.

- b. They are doing it deliberately trying to dismiss it

2. The lost man denies all obligation to God.

3. The Bible refers to such hardness of heart as being reprobate

2 Timothy 3:8 – “Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.”

4. Because of his rejection of God’s truth God gives him over to an even worse reprobation

Romans 1:28 – “And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;”

5. The lost man by his very nature rebels against God. God has revealed Himself – truth has been revealed but the lost man will not receive it. Because of the hardness of the sinner’s heart he refuses to make good use of the truth God has provided.

- B. Martin Luther referred to this as the Bondage of the will

1. A bad tree bears bad fruit

Matthew 7:17-18 – “Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”

2. The lost man wants full, total, complete independence. He wants full autonomy

- a. This pride is the cause of all sin – it was even the cause of Adam’s sin. God told Adam he had freedom to eat of every tree but one. God was telling Adam that he did not have absolute autonomy.

Adam sinned by declaring that he would have absolute autonomy.

- b. The lost man is corrupted by a rebellious heart that is full of pride and selfishness.

- c. He is motivated by that which gives pleasure to the flesh and he will seek it no matter what.

II. Because of their hatred of God

A. Human beings are opposed to God

1. They are God-less
Romans 1:18 – “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men”
2. In other words, they hate God and they hate His law
Romans 1:28 – “And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge. . .”
3. In **Verse 30** Paul describes lost humanity as “haters of God”
θεοστυγής – from **θεός** and **στυγερός** – hated, abominable, loathsome
4. Atheism has nothing to do with man’s ignorance of God
 - a. Romans 1 states clearly that all men know God
 - b. Man’s problem is that he hates God

B. Lost humanity hates God’s absolute dominion – His absolute rule – His sovereignty

1. Man wants autonomy. He wants to run his own life.
Psalms 2:2-3 – “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, *saying*, ³ Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.”
 - a. Man says, “let us break the shackles, let us have our independence
 - b. But God will now allow independence
2. God does not share His dominion
Romans 11:34 – “For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?”
 - a. In other words God doesn’t need advice or counsel
 - b. God declares Himself to be fully independent. He commands undivided allegiance
Exodus 20:3 – “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”
 - c. God has revealed Himself in creation but for the lost man it is simply a reminder of God’s almighty sovereignty and that is repulsive to him.
3. This is why His absolute sovereignty is repulsive even to some believers
 - a. Election is seen as unfitting for God.
 - b. God says He will do as He pleases
Romans 9:15 – “For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”
Romans 9:21 – “Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?”
4. This is why Jesus was so despised
 - a. He was filled with love and mercy and truth – but He also came with absolute authority.
 - b. He amazed the Jews with His authority
Mark 1:22 – “And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.”

Matthew 21:23 – “And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?”

- c. He condemned the hypocrisy of the Pharisees with Divine authority – and He was despised
- d. The lost man will have nothing of Christ
There is a natural hatred, a natural hostility because He condemns their sin

John 19:15 – “But they cried out, Away with *him*, away with *him*, crucify him.”

Mark 15:14 – “Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath he done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him.”

- 6. This is the great condemnation of man
 - a. The great condemnation of man is that although God has clearly revealed Himself they hate Him and love their sin
 - b. This was demonstrated most clearly in Christ
John 3:19 – “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”
 - c. Because of this Jesus will pour His wrath out upon humanity
Psalms 2:12 – “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish *from* the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed *are* all they that put their trust in him.”

C. Lost humanity also hates the holiness of God

- 1. We often think of holiness as obedience to the Law. Holiness actually means separateness.
 - a. For a man, obedience to the Law is part of our separateness. We are separated from sin and unrighteousness.
 - b. We are separate because we belong to God
- 2. In terms of God’s holiness, however, it is not an ethical term at all
 - a. God’s holiness is His absolute separateness from all else
 - b. It is a part of God’s character—it is a divine attribute. One of His chief attributes.
God is “Holy, Holy, Holy”
 - c. To assault this infinitely holy God is the greatest of treason.
- 3. The holiness of God is fearful for the best of men
 - a. Isaiah trembled in the presence of God
Isaiah 6:5 – “Woe *is* me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”
 - b. Habakkuk also trembled at the revelation of God
Habakkuk 3:16 – “When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself”

- c. Peter trembled before the holiness of Christ
Luke 5:8 – “When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”
- 4. The lost man also views the holiness of God with terror
 - a. God has revealed His wrath upon humanity
Romans 1:18 – “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men”
 - b. They respond by denying it, suppressing it.
Romans 1:18 – “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;”
 - c. They suppress it until all fear is gone
They cover up the truth. They deny the truth. They pervert and change the truth.
Romans 1:25 – “ Who changed the truth of God into a lie”

Conclusion:

1. God has clearly revealed Himself. He is known plainly to all but this knowledge is suppressed. In other words, God is not known because they don't *want* to know Him.
2. God has so plainly revealed Himself that all men will be left without excuse. Millions will make vain efforts to excuse themselves.
 - A. Some might say, “But I didn't know you existed.”
God says creation plainly reveals His existence. There is sufficient evidence for anyone interested in looking.
Romans 1:20 – “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:*”
 - B. Some might say, “But I didn't know I was doing anything wrong.”
God says there is an inward testimony.
Romans 1:19 – “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them.”
Romans 2:15 – “Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness”
3. There will be many excuses but the truth is this. God has revealed Himself and the lost man refuses to worship Him. God gave them the true revelation of Himself and they suppressed it.
2 Thessalonians 2:12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.
4. If you haven't received Christ what will your excuse be?
Christ has been gracious to say come. You don't come because you will not have Him.
 - A. If this is your heart, pray that God will give you a new heart.
 - B. If you have a desire to come to Christ, come! And He will receive you.