

Notes for the Ones Called Out to Meet

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Suppressing the Truth

by Dan Trygg

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God’s capable-means toward salvation for everyone believing, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it a righteousness of God is revealed/uncovered out-from faith unto faith; as it is written, ‘but the righteous person will live out-from faith.’ For the wrath of God is revealed/uncovered from heaven against all irreverence and unrighteousness of people, the ones suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, are being perceived, being seen according to the things He has been made, so that they are without excuse. ²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their reasonings, and their unperceptive heart was darkened.”

Rom. 1:16-21

After greetings and introductions, Paul begins his most clear and systematic presentation of what he teaches and stands for. **He is *not ashamed of the Good News* about God’s provision for our salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, ...and the obedient response of faith that leads to salvation. That gospel message is the powerful-means God has chosen to use to deliver people from the deception, degradation and destruction of sin, and bring them to a new life of truth, transformation and triumph in Him.**

There are two very important “revelations” or “uncoverings” that Paul describes. They are related to one another, one being the problem, and the other the solution. The fact that they are “uncoverings” implies that **they are realities that are already operational or available, *whether we recognize them or not.***

The gospel message “uncovers” ***a righteousness which God offers to us as a gift, ...a righteousness that both hides our imperfections and brokenness before our holy God, while also giving us new life to transform us.*** This message offers new hope, new life and the power to change to those who accept it by faith. The message *itself* does not change us. Trust in God’s promise enables *Him* to work in our lives to begin a powerful transformation.

The other “revelation” Paul mentions provides a backdrop to this gospel hope, **...the dark and desperate condition of humanity.** The explanatory words from Paul’s pen are, “For ***the wrath of God is revealed*** from heaven...” We may not like to hear that. It may chafe against our sensibilities, but we need to be reminded of the nature of our existence. **We are *not alone in the universe.* According to the Bible, we have been created by God, and we are answerable to Him.** He has made us, and placed us here on this planet to be His stewards. From the beginning, there have always been expectations from God. He gave us a charge and a responsibility to fill the earth and bring it under order, to rule over it, to work it (lit, “serve it”) and to preserve it (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15). **This is *not negotiable!*** It does not matter if we voluntarily choose to believe in Him, or not. Ultimately, He *will* hold us accountable for what we do while we are here (Rev. 20:11-15; II Cor. 5:10; Act 17:30,31). **Furthermore, He expects us to acknowledge Him, and be grateful for the blessings He has given to us.** He expects us to live with Him in mind, so that all that we do would agree with His interests, values and purposes. When we do so, He is pleased. **When we disregard God, and abuse what He has created,** He experiences the same kind of feeling we do when people *do not respect us and misuse our property.* **He becomes angry.** The anger He feels is akin to our own, for we are made in His image, and emotion is part of that God-like-ness. His anger is described by the Greek word, *orgē*. This word refers to the swelling of a natural impulse to right what is wrong, to avenge evil, or to confront abuse and injustice. It results in *a mental bent toward action.* It is more of a “slow burn”, rather than an explosion, but the point is that **our choices to sin and to dishonor Him offend Him, and He becomes increasingly inclined to address that disrespect** in some way. His wrath is against all irreverence (disregard of Him) and un-right-eousness (improper use of what is from God, or unjust actions toward others) of people who suppress the truth by their unjust or inappropriate living.

At some level, everyone knows there is a God, and they know what He generally expects. The things of God are evident, or are made visible, through the created things He has made. Even His eternal power and deity are discerned, clearly seen through creation, so that no one has an excuse (1:20). **Since people experientially-know something of God, they are accountable for that awareness.** The power, order, design and beauty of nature externally testify to God’s existence and nature (Psa. 19:1-6). The blessings of His provision are meant to cause people to know of His goodness (Acts 14:17; I Tim. 4:4,5). There is also a longing, an inner witness that there is more beyond this life. This motivates people to seek after God (Ecc. 3:11; Acts 17:22-29).

As I mentioned, **the proper response to this inner knowledge of God’s existence is to honor Him and give Him thanks.** As Creator, *He* is the Key to unlocking the mysteries of life, the longings of the human heart, and the Cornerstone of truth, from which all reality emanates and is ordered. **When people choose to disregard Him, a**

process of spiritual desensitization and moral degeneration begins to grow. Paul describes this process in verses 21-32. Without *God* as their focus, people become *confused* and *disoriented*. Their hearts become darkened. Their reasonings about life become empty and futile. **Without God as their Key to knowledge, people are unable to put the pieces of the puzzle of life together** (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). Their speculations and explanations of reality become foolish and misguided. Historically, what happened in most cultures was that people gave up acknowledging the glory of the invisible, incorruptible God, and began to focus on all sorts of lesser demi-gods and imagined deities in the likeness of animals or people. Idolatry was born. This phenomenon is reflected not only in the idolatry of religious images, but also the idolatrous worship of movie stars, sports figures, musicians or other obsessions from this world. The point is that **men and women often exchange worship of God for the exaltation of natural things or people.**

When people turn from God to exalting themselves and their own wisdom, God will give them over to their wanderings. The first level of such self-focus is **sensuality**. Instead of focusing *outwardly* toward God, their focus becomes *inward*. They become more aware of their inner feelings and desires, and turn toward fulfilling these sensual desires. The lusts of their hearts lead them into behaviors that are judged by God to be unclean or sinful. Furthermore, **they dishonor or devalue their bodies by attempting to fulfill their lusts in ways that are inappropriate** (vs. 24). For example, wanting to be loved and sexually gratified, they do not *honor* their bodies by reserving them for a covenant partner in marriage. Rather, they give themselves away to another in lust, and in so doing they *dishonor* the precious gift that the sexual relationship was meant to be, cheapening *it* and *themselves*. Promiscuity also exposes them to the possibility of disease, which can be hugely damaging. Or, they may choose to gratify the sensual desires of taste and eating, and destroy their health by *over indulgence*. They become fat and their bodies pay the price for their sin. Drunkenness is a further extension of this same principle. People drink to excess to alter their mood. In so doing, their inhibitions and judgment becomes impaired. They tend to do things that they would never do when sober, thus *dishonoring themselves*, and endangering their physical safety. **These are natural avenues of sensual pleasure, removed from safe, healthy boundaries. They become an unhealthy focus in the person's life, as they attempt to fill the emptiness they feel inside, which only God can truly supply** (Eph. 4:17-19).

As they continue down this road of seeking and serving *their* sensual pleasure, and disregarding *God*, **another step in the desensitization process is that people begin to explore in areas that are unnatural and even more dishonorable.** *God gives them over to their unseemly passions.* Note that **they are driven by a stronger lust**, and they are drawn to do something which is *contrary to nature* (vs. 26). **They abandon the way their bodies were obviously designed to be utilized, and dishonor themselves even further by pursuing pleasure in ways that God never intended.** The example Paul used here is that of homosexual behavior. It is not politically acceptable in our culture to challenge the appropriateness of this so-called “alternative lifestyle”, but the Bible is *quite clear* (Lev. 18:22-28; I Cor. 6:9; I Tim. 1:10; Jude 1:7). **God did not make men to be with men, ...nor women to be with women.** It is very evident, just from a cursory natural examination. If you take their clothes off, and *if you understand how things work*, “What is designed to go *where* in order for the race to continue?” Tab A fits into slot B. Tab A is designed to deliver sperm to slot B, which is designed to receive it so that fertilization can take place. **It does not take a rocket scientist to understand how things are intended to work!** For example, those who would argue that tab A could also fit into slot C are faced with the obvious problem that slot C does not come equipped with natural lubrication, where slot B does. Furthermore, fertilization cannot take place in that fashion. Slot B with another slot B will never produce offspring naturally, either. **The natural, normal function is quite clear.** Does that mean pleasure or affection cannot be found in these other relationships? No, not at all. There would be no issue if pleasure or affection could not happen between people of the same sex. People would not be drawn into those relationships, if pleasure and affection could not be found there. The Bible clearly says that they “burn in their desire toward one another” (vs. 27). (Does *having strong feelings* mean that they are *right* or appropriate, or that I should *act* on them? Of course not! Then there would be no moral boundaries at all! We would all be like animals.) Paul’s argument, however, is that *God did not design things this way*, and **to pursue inappropriate affection and pleasure in same sex relationships is to misuse and misdirect what God intended to be used in a healthier venue.** It is to hijack and misappropriate what God meant to be used in His design for humanity, and to use it in ways contrary to His purposes. In doing this, are we *honoring* the Creator, or *dishonoring* Him? Although homosexuality is the illustration Paul used here, I believe that other *unnatural means of pursuing pleasure* would also fit in here. **The use of hard core drugs would seem to be a similar thing.** The use of an unnatural substance in order get pleasure also seems to be a deeper step into darkness and bondage. **Those who dishonor God, and disregard how He has made us, will receive a corresponding consequence in themselves (not just their bodies). This is more than physical; it is also emotional and spiritual.**

A final step in the degeneration of those who do not acknowledge God is a depraved mind (vss. 28-32). **These people have come to call evil good, and good evil** (Isa. 5:20), **and actually encourage others to pursue sin.** This is the sad state of our society today. We have come to *champion* evil, and to *deride* the standards of God.