

No Excuse!

The Banquet Table of Consequences – Part III

Romans 1:19-20

Introduction

More than two hundred years ago, American leaders crafted a declaration called, *The Declaration of Independence*. This document includes words that become more and more profound to me, as I watch American society decay further and further. The profound words are, “We hold these truths to be self-evident”.

These words are saying, “We believe that certain things are absolute; they are truths. And, not only that, but certain truth is recognizable to everyone. Thus we say, ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident’.”

In other words, this is saying that you do not need any outside reason or proof that these truths exist because everyone knows them intuitively.

So, what did our forefathers consider to be absolutely obvious to all of humanity? They did not consider these truths obvious to just Americans, because truth is truth in any culture, at any time, in any country, anywhere in the world. Two plus two is not four in America and five in India and six in England. The earth is not round for Frenchmen and flat for Spaniards. Truth is truth everywhere.

Now, the truth about the shape of the earth has to be determined. And, you had to learn how to add two numbers together. Therefore, these truths are absolute, but they are not self-evident.

So, what truths do you know, without ever having to go to school to learn them? We are told as the sentence continues, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal”.

In one sentence you have the belief in absolute truth, in the dignity of humanity, and the belief in a Creator. In fact, the next phrase says, “that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights”.

Everyone now, runs to the word, “rights”. “Yea, we want to expound on that word,” while they rush past the words, “they are endowed by their Creator”.

The originators of this declaration simply believed that everyone had an intuitive knowledge that there is a Creator.

By the way, that is why you cannot teach American history and expound on the virtues of our heritage, and, at the same time, teach evolution. You cannot have kids quoting, “All men have equal dignity because they were created,” and, at the same time, saying, “Humans are nothing more than animals that simply evolved.” Some fifth grade kid is going to catch on and say, “Hey, wait a second! Which is it?!”

Let me follow this thought a little further. When you have a self-evident Creator, self-evident value to human life, and self-evident absolute truths, you then have self-evident morality as well. That is, it is evident as to how to treat human beings; how to live.

In 1798 President John Adams wrote,

We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people.ⁱ

Compare his words with the thinking of our day that you cannot legislate morality. In other words, what is right for you is right for you; there is no such thing as self-evident truth or morality.

The framers of our nation, however, believed that morality was not only something that the country should legislate, but that each individual should hold themselves accountable to the absolute truth of the Scripture.

James Madison, the architect of the Constitution of the United States, wrote,

*We have staked the whole future of American civilization . . . upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to control ourselves, to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God.*ⁱⁱ

Can you imagine a politician saying those words in our culture today? If they said, “What we need to do is get back to obeying the Ten Commandments of God,” there would be one word to describe that politician – “unemployed”.

These early leaders, however, were saying, “We hold these truths to be self-evident,” – that there is a Creator, and there is, within His creation, dignity which demands integrity.

They were not the first to come up with this, though. Several thousand years earlier, a man named Paul, said virtually the same thing.

The Evidence! Self-evident Truth

When you turn to Paul’s letter to the Romans, you discover that his logical argument includes this idea of self-evident truth. Look at chapter 1, verses 18 through 20.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made . . .

Paul says, in effect, “Here is the evidence.”

Conscience – the inner light

1. The first evidence is that the truth is within men – the truth of conscience. We will call this, the inner light.

We discover an illustration of this intuitive sense of right and wrong in the book of Acts. Paul has just been shipwrecked. He, and the other victims, swim for the island of Malta. In chapter 28, verses 1 through 4, we read,

When they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta. The natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all. But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, “Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.”

Here are superstitious unbelievers, without any record of Scripture or the gospel to reveal their intuitive belief that murder is wrong and should be punished. They thought Paul had killed someone and that justice was after him. He had escaped from the sea, but justice still caught up with him, in the form of a deadly snakebite. So, they thought, “This guy’s gonna get what he deserves!”

Where did they get that sense of justice; that sense of right and wrong? It is self-evident truth.

Continue to verses 5 and 6.

However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm. But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.

Poor Paul! First, he is a condemned murderer and then, he is a god. They do not know whether to bring out the handcuffs or roll out the red carpet.

What I find interesting, for our study, is that these people knew right from wrong. In fact, they knew that wrongdoers should be punished. They, and everyone else on planet earth, have always known that lying is wrong and murder is wrong and cheating is wrong.

You can watch even the most liberal thinker, who denies the existence of absolute moral truth, go into

action when he is deceived by a financial advisor, or when he is treated rudely, or when his car is hit by another driver, or when his neighbor's dog rips up his flower bed. He will say, "How dare that man rip me off," "How dare she lie to me," "I can't believe they did that to me," "They should have known better and they ought to pay!"

He is proving that a sense of justice is embedded in his heart. It is called conscience.

Romans, chapter 2, verse 15, says,

. . . that [unbelievers] show the work of the Law written in their hearts . . .

Conscience is that inner evidence or light.

Creation – the outer light

2. The second evidence of God's existence is nature or creation. We will call this, the outer light.

This includes outer evidence; such as, birds and trees, the seasons, the orbits of planets and the light of the sun, the complexity of creation and the immensity of creation. Even secular scientists and academicians are beginning to admit to the idea of "design" within creation. Let me quote several secular authors:

- "Imagine a machine, with thousands of dials representing everything from the gravitational constant, the charge on the electron, the mass of the proton, and so on . . . each dial has many possible settings, and even the slightest change would make a universe where life was impossible. Yet each dial is set to the exact value needed to sustain life."
- "We have no idea why the strengths of the forces are fine-tuned to support life."
- "I am not a religious person, but I could say this universe is designed very well for the existence of life."

Perhaps it is simply because, as Freeman Dyson, a recent Templeton Award winner, wrote, "the universe in some sense must have known we were coming."ⁱⁱⁱ

It did – because it had been created and completed in finished, mature form before a mature, fully grown man and woman were created, named Adam and Eve.

And, God created it all in six days. Never is the Hebrew word for "day," when accompanied by a

numerical adjective; such as, the third day, the second day, the first day, used figuratively. Never, in Old Testament Hebrew, are the terms "evening" and "morning" used figuratively. These terms are always used literally.

Exodus, chapter 20, verse 11, states,

For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

So, man is to labor six days and rest on the seventh day because in six days, the Lord created the heavens, earth, and sea, and everything in them, and rested on the seventh. Unless days of equal length are intended, this illustration and command would be absolutely meaningless.

This record of Scripture tells us that God created it all.

David wrote, in Psalm, chapter 33, verse 6,

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made . . .

Skip to verse 9.

For He spoke, and it was done . . .

What does the evidence suggest? Even an unbelieving astrophysicist said recently, "The universe just seems tailor made to support life."

The universe seems tailor made . . . because it *is* tailor made.

We hold these truths to be self-evident – there is a Creator.

What man does with self-evident truth

What does man naturally do with this self-evident truth? He imprisons it. Look at the last phrase of verse 18, in Romans, chapter 1.

. . . men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness

In other words, they silence the truth in order to keep their sin.

They do not progress in understanding. Paul says further, in verse 21b,

. . . their foolish heart was darkened.

Their hearts are darkened by their assault against the truth.

Evolution

The evolutionist says that man evolved as an animal from animals, and that, over time, he developed and progressed intellectually to the point he felt an impulse to worship something. He therefore, took a stick and fashioned an idol and thus, religion began. Man, however, continued to progress in his enlightenment until modern man realized that he himself, was god.

He began as an animal and now lives as god.

Creation

However, the record of man, as given to us in Romans, chapter 1, says that the exact opposite is occurring. Where evolution says man began as an animal and progressed to become his own god, Paul declares that man was created in the image of God and has digressed to live like an animal. Man just does not want to admit it.

Romans, chapter 1, will give the results of men and societies at large, who deny these self-evident truths.

Two of the most profound truths that you could ever know and that are so different from what you observe around you, are these:

- There is a God, and
- I am not Him.

Someone in our church family sent this interesting story to me. Legend has it that one day, a group of scientists got together and decided that man had progressed such a long way that they no longer needed their primitive God. So they picked one scientist to go and tell Him that they were done with Him. The scientist walked up to God and said, “Um, we’ve decided that we no longer need You. We’re to the point now that we can clone people and do so many other miraculous marvels, why don’t You just leave?”

God listened very patiently and kindly to the man, and after he had finished talking, God said, “How about this, let’s say we have a man-making contest.”

To which the scientist replied, “OK, great!”

But God added, “Now, we’re going to do this just like I did back in the old days with Adam.”

The scientist said, “No problem,” and bent down and grabbed a handful of dirt.

God looked at him and said, “No, no, no. You go get your own dirt!”

The Guilt! Suppressing the Truth

So what does enlightened man do with obvious, self-evident truth? Paul tells us that he holds it down; he keeps it under wraps; he imprisons it and attempts to muffle it.

Let me give you two things that mankind reveals by imprisoning the truth.

A natural hatred of God’s sovereignty

1. First, he reveals his natural hatred for God’s sovereignty.

Why can’t man just look around and say, “Yep, there must be a Creator?”

It is because, if there is a Creator, then man is accountable. And man does not want limitations.

Go all the way back to the first man and woman. Adam and Eve, according to the account in Genesis, chapter 2, were told they could eat of every tree in the Garden of Eden, except one tree – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So, Adam and Eve were, with that one limitation, held accountable for their actions. God warned them, “In the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

Oh, did that tree bother Adam and Eve. I agree with Boice that, “this tree became an offense to them. That tree stood for a limitation on their personal desire – it represented something they were not allowed to do.”^{iv}

There were a million things they could do. There were hundreds of things they could eat. But they were told they could not do one thing – and that meant God was the sovereign master and they were to be obedient subjects.

Then the serpent slithered in and said, “Let God know He’s met His match in you. Eat from that tree and you’ll be His equal; you’ll be as God. No more sovereign God, but sovereign gods!”

In the same way today, man hates God’s rule because he wants to be unaccountable, unlimited, and unfettered in his sin. He wants a lesser, more submissive God, or no God at all.

A natural rebellion against God’s holiness

2. Secondly, man reveals that there is within his heart a natural rebellion against God’s holiness.

Holiness means set apart. A God who is holy reminds us that we are unholy; that we are sinful. Nothing offends sinful man more than being reminded that he is sinful.

After Adam and Eve had sinned, by disobeying God, they hid themselves. Later, they admitted to God that they were ashamed and did not want to be around Him because His holiness would confront their unholiness.

You might say, “But mankind seems to be so religious. He has invented a myriad of religions with confessionals, penances, duties, and Meccas to meet this holy God. He has created a myriad of shrines to a myriad of gods.”

Ladies and gentlemen, the religions of the world are not attempts to pursue a holy God; they are an attempt to get around Him. Man creates rituals, ceremonies, and systems of works not because he is seeking after God, but because he is running away from God.

The one who truly comes to God, knows he has nothing to offer this offended, holy, sovereign, furious God. He comes asking for nothing more than mercy and forgiveness.

The Verdict! Guilty . . . No Excuse!

However, because man rejects the evidences of creation and conscience, Paul goes on to say, in verse 20 of Romans, chapter 1,

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen,

(or perceived; such as, sovereignty and holiness),

being understood through what has been made,

(here is the verdict),

so that they are without excuse.

They are guilty! They are without excuse! They are literally, without legal defense. So:

- The millions in Africa who have never heard the gospel – guilty!
- The millions in China who have never heard the gospel – guilty!
- The myriad in America who have never heard the true gospel – without excuse!

- The millions in India who have never heard the name of Christ – without excuse!

Why? Paul has explained self-evident truth that is denied all over the world. Mankind worships sticks and stumps, rather than seek the face of the Creator.

The Bible makes it clear that God will judge people by what they did with what they knew! F. F. Bruce put it this way, “God will judge non-Christians by the light that was available, not by the light that was unavailable.”

What was that available light to all mankind, all over the world, at all times? It was the inner light of conscience and the outer light of creation.

They are without excuse! And, do not forget that Paul is writing to the Romans. They had no church, no Bible, no gospel, no preacher, and yet, they were without excuse!

Application Universal, Timeless Truths

By way of application, let me give you three universal, timeless truths.

1. When conscience is humbly respected, it declares, “I am a sinner.”
2. When nature is properly observed, it declares, “There is a Creator.”
3. The Creator will one day judge the sinner, not on the basis of what they did not know to refuse, but on the basis of what they did know and refused.

You might say, “But, to believe in creation, as given in Romans, chapter 1, and Genesis, chapter 1, will take faith.”

It will also take faith to believe in evolution, as well as any of the other eighty theories of origin that have floated around this country since 1808.

But, if you think Genesis, chapter 1, takes a lot of faith, you haven’t seen anything yet. If you think it is a stretch to believe that God created one man from dust and one woman from that man’s rib bone, you will never believe that God will raise all the bodies of deceased believers, at the rapture of the church, that have already returned to dust. Millions of bodies which have returned to dust, in one moment, He will recreate and resurrect, according to I Thessalonians, chapter 4, verse 16!

If you have trouble with one man rising from the dust, how will you believe millions of people rising

from the dust? And, if you have trouble believing this earth was created by His word, you will never believe that the next earth will be created by God. Revelation, chapter 21, verse 1, tells us about the end of time and the beginning of eternity,

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away . . .

If you have trouble with this world being created by God, you will never believe He can create the next world. But, just as He created this world, my friends, He will keep His word and create the next world. And, in that new world, according to Revelation, chapter 21, verses 4 and 23,

. . . He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away. . . . And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.

For those who have received the Lamb of God, one day they will see the Lamb face to face. That will not occur on this old earth, which will have been destroyed, it will occur on a new earth, which will have been created for all of eternity. The new earth will be illumined by the light of that Lamb who is our sovereign, holy, Savior. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 3/11/2001 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ William D. Watkins, The New Absolutes (Bethany House Publishers, 1996), p. 248.

ⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 248.

ⁱⁱⁱ World (Sept. 2, 2000), p. 17.

^{iv} James Montgomery Boice, Romans Vol. 1 (Baker Book House, 1999), p. 148.