

Does Romans 1 indicate that non-Christians can be saved?

Introduction

One of the more interesting passages in Paul's letters occurs in Romans chapter 1; specifically, in verses 18 through 32. Here is that entire passage:

Romans 1:18-32 (ESV):

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For 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 they are without excuse. ²¹For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

²⁴Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰slanders, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

From my understanding, the above passage tells us the following:

We can determine for ourselves that God exists, by *observing His creation*. In other words, the complexity of the universe, and the precise physical laws that govern it, make it obvious that there *must* have been an intelligent designer who built it.

Of course, the above point is *extremely* important - and proponents of evolution would be well served to consider it...

An additional belief

In addition to the above point, some people have *another* belief about Romans 1. This additional belief has to do with "ignorant" people; that is, people who **never** heard about Yahweh or Jesus - not even **once** - during their entire lives.

Basically, some people believe that the above passage means that “ignorant” people can actually be saved - just by acknowledging the evidence of God in creation.

From what I have seen, the reasoning behind this belief is as follows:

1. All of us can tell that God exists, just by looking at creation.
2. Therefore, ignorant people do not have any excuse, for not believing in God.
3. So, if ignorant people do *not* believe in God, then they will be destroyed.
4. However, if ignorant people *do* believe in God, then they will be saved - just like Christians will be!

Of course, the question to ask is: Is the above belief supported by Scripture? Does Scripture actually say that ignorant people can be saved, merely by acknowledging that God *must* exist, due to His creation?

Take a look at the above passage again. That passage states that everyone can determine that God *exists*, due to His creation. However, that passage does *not* give us any of the “details” about the God who created the universe.

In particular, that passage does **not** state that people can determine any of the following items, just by observing creation:

- The God who created the universe is Yahweh, the God of Israel;
- Jesus is the only-begotten Son of Yahweh;
- Jesus died for the sins of mankind, and then Yahweh resurrected him;
- Jesus will return to the earth in the future, to establish the kingdom of God.

It is not possible for an ignorant person to learn *any* of the above items on his own, simply by observing creation. In other words, an ignorant person will **not** be able to “figure out” any of the above items, just by noticing the complexity of the universe, and the precise physical laws that govern it.

Basically, the *only* thing that an ignorant person can learn about God, from observing creation, is that there must be *some* sort of “divine being” who created the universe.

What items do we need to believe, to be saved?

So, the question now is as follows:

Does belief in a generic “divine creator” ensure that people will be *saved*?

If the answer to that question is “yes”, then of course Romans 1 does indicate that ignorant people can be saved - just by acknowledging that God created the universe.

However, that also means that almost **ALL** religions can save people! After all, virtually all religions believe in a divine creator. Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and even Greek mythology all hold that *some* sort of “god” created the universe.

So, **if** all we need to do to be saved, is to believe that *some* sort of divine being created the universe, **then** that basically means that the phrase “all religions lead to God” is actually *true*!

As a result, let’s see if Scripture tells us what, *exactly* we need to believe, in order to be saved.

John 17:3 (ESV - Jesus praying to Yahweh):

³ And this is eternal life, that they know you (Yahweh) the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Mark 12:28-30 (ESV):

²⁸ And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord (Yahweh) our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’

John 3:16-18 (ESV):

¹⁶“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

John 14:6-7 (ESV):

⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Acts 4:11-12 (ESV):

¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹²And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

1 John 5:13 (ESV):

¹³I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

1 Corinthians 15:1-5 (ESV):

¹Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ²and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain. ³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Mark 4:10-12 (ESV - The parable of the sower):

¹⁰And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. ¹¹And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, ¹²so that

"they may indeed see but not perceive,
and may indeed hear but not understand,
lest they should turn and be forgiven."

Luke 8:11-12 (ESV - The parable of the sower):

¹¹ Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. ¹²The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.

In my mind, the above passages state - explicitly - that we *must* believe the following items, in order to be *saved*:

- The God who created the universe is Yahweh, the God of Israel;
- Jesus is the only-begotten Son of Yahweh;
- Jesus died for the sins of mankind, and then Yahweh resurrected him;
- Jesus will return to the earth in the future, to establish the kingdom of God.

Of course, as mentioned earlier, ignorant people cannot learn *any* of those items, simply by observing creation!

As a result, it appears to me that Romans 1 does not state that ignorant people can be saved!

Conclusion

It certainly appears to me that Romans 1 states the following:

Everyone can determine - on his own - that God *exists*; simply by looking at the awesome creation that He has given us.

However, that does **not** mean that everyone can be saved, just by acknowledging that *some* sort of "divine creator" exists. According to Scripture, there are some very **specific** items about God and Jesus, which people **must** believe, in order to be saved - and those items cannot be determined, just by observing creation.

Of course, Scripture *also* tells us that God wants everyone to be saved - i.e., He does **not** want *anyone* to die:

1 Timothy 2:3-4 (ESV):

³This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

2 Peter 3:9 (ESV):

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

So, we have an apparent “dilemma” here. On one hand, there are literally *millions* of people who have lived and died, without ever hearing about Yahweh or Jesus - even once. As noted above, those people did *not* have any opportunity to learn the items necessary to be saved.

On the other hand, we know that God wants everyone to be saved. In my mind, the word “everyone” means “every human being who has ever lived”. Consider this verse:

1 Timothy 4:10 (ESV):

¹⁰For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

In other words, God is the savior of everyone - *not* just (but especially) of those who believe in Him during this age.

At this point, some of you may ask: “If ignorant people *cannot* be saved by observing creation - and if God wants *everyone* to be saved - then *what* is going to happen to ignorant people?”

If you are interested, the following presentation contains one *possible* answer to that question:

[The Resurrection of Ignorant People](#)