

Where is the Church in Africa?

The African Lifestyle Confirms That All Are Under Sin



By Denis Chimwee

Introduction

Havoc reigns in scores of denominations all over Africa. People are busy seeking the wealth of this world. They do not preach Christ as the center of the gospel. They are preaching money while hiding in the name of Jesus. All this shows the degree of their hatred to God. The Jews, Abraham's offspring, were well known as God's people whom He ordained to be the light to the Gentiles—those people who did not know God (Acts 13:42). For this reason, the Jews were more religious and privileged than the Gentiles. When Christ came to redeem the world, the Jews were the first to reject Him as the Messiah. Much enmity for Christ grew in them. Both Jews and Gentiles, because of their collective sin in Adam, are filthy because out of their hearts spring the deeds that are not charitable to God. From verses 9 through 18 in Romans 3, Paul exposes that both Jews and Gentiles have the same bad standing before God. My aim in this paper is to portray that Africans have their part "under sin" (Rom 3:11) and hence, are in need of Christ. We commence by showing how every race is opposed to the righteousness that Jesus demands and will conclude by considering how sin is hurting the African church.

The Substance from which Sin Rules

Paul starts by quoting from the book of Psalms (14:1-3) to show humanity's rebellion. In Rom 3:10-11 the depravity of man is established. The use of "none" in both verses speaks of universality. In verse 10 we see that, regardless of their difference in complexion, knowledge, class, country or continent, they are not lovely in God's eyes. They are all fallen beings. MacArthur states, "They are completely subservient and in bondage to, the dominion of sin."¹ Man cannot understand God's righteousness because his sin brings down his mind. Sin took the opportunity of the law to blind men. They cannot understand how holy God is (Rom 7:11). J. Phillips describes them as the ones who are "strangely clouded to spiritual realities."² Neither is God the desire of

¹ John MacArthur, *Romans*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1983), 180.

² John Phillips, *Romans*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Chicago: Grand Rapids, 2002), 57.

human hearts; the fulfillment of their will is what they crave for. Sin is what results because they are under its dominion. What is infected is their hearts.

Contextual Clues

From Rom 3:10-18 we see that sin is not just lying inactive in the human heart. In verse 12, men are leaning the wrong direction. Spence adds: "To them it's a sign of weak intellect to be a Christian or to believe the Bible."³ They follow their pleasures and start to ignore the true way of God. The results are that they all become useless because they are dead in their sin (1 Timothy 5:6). Christ is the one who can make them alive spiritually but they are wandering from Him. In Verse 13 they speak the foulest language imaginable. Ephesians 4:29 says that this cannot impart grace. This simply proves that they are not of the house of grace. In the Law of Moses it is written that no one is allowed to kill (Exodus 20:13), but all people do not fear murder. We first see this when Cain murdered Abel in Genesis 4. In the present time this happens, as some murder in their hearts and some lay knives on other people. The cause for all this unwillingness to live according to righteous standards is that they seek to fulfill their desires. This is the result of a lack of knowledge of God. This downward progression of their sin is causing widespread devastation of every thing surrounding men. They gain nothing but misery (verse 16). There is no peace because peace is found in God whom they rejected (Rom 5:1). There is none who honors God. Henry points out that: "Wicked people have no fear of God in their eyes; they are governed by other rules not God."⁴ Consequently, Deuteronomy 7:10 promises to those who hate Him, they will be wiped away by God.

Five Ways Sin Controls the African Church

We have seen in verses 10-18 that people are engulfed in sin. Accordingly, they have gone their own way (v. 12). There are several ways that sin controls Africans. First, many Africans ignore the clear gospel message and embrace ancestor worship. The true God is too great for them to understand. Even though some think they are reaching the true God, they still can't find Him because they are in the realm of sin and their minds are blinded by darkness. Second, the love of money is causing them to leave the true gospel. They preach what holds greater appeal in the ears of their hearers so that people would love them. These are false teachers (2 Peter 2:3). People in their vicinity also flock to these money preachers because they do not want to hear

³ H.D.M. Spence, *Romans*, The Pulpit Commentary (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson), 90.

⁴ Mathew Henry, *Romans*, Mathew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 1760.

about the badness of sin. What they want is general niceness and some ways to get rich. Most African Christians are not like the Bereans who searched the Scriptures (Acts 17:11).

Third, African pulpits are filled with theoretical practices. They are concerned with telling the ideas that are a joy to hear rather than proclaiming that cross of wood that saves people from the wrath of God. Their desire is not Christ but pleasure and favorable environments. Fourth, the church is not growing because some do not believe in the existence of God. Rather, they want to dwell in their sin without feeling guilty. Others are living their lives as though there is no God. Though they believe and know His existence they do not desire to worship Him. Fifth, there are those among them who say that they do not preach money but Christ. Yes, they say that they believe in Christ, but their believing is like that of the demons in James 2:19—a “faith” which does not bear fruit. On the whole, these marks show us that the need for Africa concerning the church is not only restoration of the gospel but the establishment of it. Many are crawling in the dark towards hell and they cannot see at all. The idol they worship is their quests, which are material things. God is offstage.

Three Things That Can Help African Christianity

Africa is said to have most of its countries reached with the gospel. The truth about Africa is that its Christianity is only an echo of the real Christianity that Africans have never heard. J Phillips points out that, “The damage wrought by sin runs deep into the very roots of the thinking process of man.”⁵ The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14). Everyone is busy seeking the comforts of this earth. They only want pleasant surroundings. What can we do? First, we need better-trained missionaries who will preach the gospel devoutly. Second, evangelism is an essential requirement in Africa. People are taking the Christian religion for granted. They are growing up with the title “Christian” but they do not even know the steps and way behind the title. Phillips reiterates: “on things that matter most man is blind.”⁶ Over and above, this continent needs to be prayed for so that the Spirit of God will work in people's hearts to turn their desires back to Christ.

Conclusion

All men are dead outside of Christ. Sin is twisting everything in our lives. Sinners are trying to put themselves at the same level with God. Humility is what they lack. They trust and seek to fulfill their enemy—their hearts (Jeremiah 17:9). They want to take God and put Him at

⁵ John Phillips, *Romans*, 56.

⁶ *Ibid*, 56.

the same level with His creatures. Barnes declares that, "A disposition not to seek God is full proof of depravity."⁷ The African lifestyle proves that they have their part under the dominion of sin. In short, this is the situation in Africa. Let us awake and arise to the faithful preaching of the gospel of Christ. Oh believers, let us pour out prayers for this continent. With sound preaching as the means that brings everyone to Christ, the Spirit of God will help us by changing their desires for Christ. The gospel of Christ has always been powerful to open people's eyes. It is our duty as believers to use the gospel to show the lost how deep is the ditch in which they have fallen. Only this will cause them to be turned back to Christ by its power and believe forever. Believers, "how shall they hear without a preacher" (Rom 10:14)? Those that have passion for the lost pass greater glory unto the throne of God; consequently, God will honor them.

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⁷ Barnes, *Romans*, Notes on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1949), 86.