

**Romans 1:18-32**

Before we look at our text this morning we need to think about the wrath of God. The idea of a God of wrath and judgment is offensive to modern man's sensibilities. It is important that we understand exactly what this means or the rest of the passage will be confusing.

Throughout Scripture we find expressions or descriptions of God as "*the God of wrath or vengeance*". Nahum 1:2-3; 6; Jeremiah 7:20; 2 Thess. 1:6-8; Rev. 19:15; Rom. 2:5; Eph. 2:1-3.

So how do we understand the concept of the wrath of God? Basically God's wrath is his divine displeasure with sin.

There are two basic words in the Greek language used to express anger. From *thumos* we get our words "*thermometer and thermos*". This is red-hot anger – the kind that overcomes people when they lose control and smack someone on the nose. It is impulsive and passionate. This is not the word used in our text. The word used is *orge*, which signifies a settled and abiding condition. It is controlled. First then, the wrath of God is perfect and controlled.

Second, this wrath of God is parallel to the righteousness of God. Verse 17 begins with "*a righteousness from God is revealed*" and verse 18 begins with "*the wrath of God is revealed.*" The wrath of God is a counterpart to the righteousness of God. Since God is righteous he hates sin and since he hates sin, it must be judged and that judgment is the wrath of God.

Following in this path we see that the wrath of God is judicial and that God reveals his wrath against all ungodliness and wickedness (*we will look at this in more detail in a few minutes*) but for now know that the wrath of God is something which men choose for themselves. John 3:18-20

Third, God's wrath is not directed against goodness but against "*all the godlessness and wickedness of men*". The wrath of God does not *'fly off the handle'* but is focused on dealing with the wickedness of mankind. Either mankind is judged or there is a substitute judge.

Ultimately the wrath of God is poured out on Christ on the cross. Here Jesus became sin, or a curse, for us and God placed on him the judgment for our sin. As John declares in 1 John 2:2 Jesus is the *propitiation* for our sin – he is the one who satisfied the wrath of God which was against us. Paul states it like this in Rom. 5:9 *Much more then, having been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through him.*

Just as '*the righteousness from God*' was best revealed in Christ's death on the cross, so too is the wrath of God. "*Whosoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him*" (John 3:36).

If one does not have the righteousness of God, he or she has the wrath of God. Those are the two revelations and the two choices.

Our text this morning in Romans 1:18-32 basically details why mankind is under the wrath of God. **1)** Because we suppress the truth; **2)** Because we pervert the truth; and **3)** Because we pervert life itself.

**I. We are under the wrath of God because we suppress the truth      Rom. 1:18-20**

"*For*" this word is important because it links this statement to the preceding one and gives a reason for it. The gospel is necessary because there is such a thing as the wrath of God. *Let me try to clarify the stages of the argument by engaging Paul in dialogue:*

Paul: *I am not ashamed of the gospel (v. 16a).*

Q: *Why not, Paul?*

Paul: *Because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (v. 16b).*

Q: How so, Paul?

Paul: *Because in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, that is, God's way of justifying sinners (v. 17).*

Q: But why is this necessary, Paul?

Paul: *Because the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness (v. 18).*

Q: But how have people suppressed the truth, Paul?

Paul: *Because what may be known about God is plain to them ... For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities ... have been clearly seen ... (vv. 19–20).*

Just as God has *revealed* his righteousness, he has *revealed* his wrath. The word revealed is *apokalupto* which has the basic meaning of '*uncovering, bringing to light or making known*'. The word is in the present tense and better translated as '*constantly revealed*' or '*continually being revealed*'.

God continually manifests his wrath against '*all*' - not some - but '*all ungodliness and unrighteousness*'. Ungodliness is '*asebeia*' meaning '*lack of reverence for God or against God*' while unrighteousness '*adikia*' is '*wickedness or injustice towards other human beings – against man*'. Together these two words show humankind's failure to love God and other people as we should, which are our two greatest responsibilities.

Ungodliness unavoidably leads to unrighteousness. Because man's relation to God is wrong, their relation to their fellow man is wrong. Men treat other men the way they do because they treat God the way they do. Why do we act selfishly? Why do we hurt each other? Because we disregard God. That is Paul's analysis.

Why? Because they suppress (*kateko*), restrain, hinder or hold back the truth (v. 18). This suppression of the truth is not passive. It carries the idea of holding something down. The idea of suppression here is '*continual and aggressive striving against the truth*.' Paul opens our eyes to the fact that all who are without Christ are in the constant process of holding down the truth and therefore are subject to God's abiding anger. There are no exceptions!

What truth? The truth that God has already made evident or plain within them and to them. God took the initiative and placed within every man, woman, and child knowledge about God and given to every man, woman, and child is knowledge about God. (v. 19).

How did God do this? Through natural revelation – through what has been made (v. 20). "Four facts characterize this natural revelation: (1) It is a clear testimony; everyone is aware of it ("*it is evident [plain]*"); (2) Everyone can understand it. We can draw conclusions about the Creator from His creation. "*His invisible attributes (eternal power and divine nature) have been clearly seen*"; (3) This revelation has gone out since the creation of the world in every generation, and; (4) It is a limited revelation in that it does not reveal everything about God (e.g., *His love and grace*) but only some things (i.e., *His power and divine nature*). Natural revelation makes man responsible to respond to his Creator in worship and submission." (Bibliotheca Sacra 157:625 (January-March 2000):26-34).

Having been clearly seen, verse 20 translates a verb (*kathoraho*), found only in the New Testament, which is used of vision with the physical eye. With such vision we see the things God has created. But "*being understood*" (v. 20) refers to inner perception. The verb means "*to perceive with the mind, understand*".

Natural revelation however does not give sufficient information for one to experience salvation. That is why everyone needs to hear the gospel.

Psalms 19 is a commentary on this statement.

This world is God's house. He's left clues everywhere about what kind of God he is. From the galaxies far, far away to the birds in the air and the wildflowers in the earth; all together they tell us about God. The heavens declare it, the earth repeats it and the wind whispers it—"He is there."

What God has revealed about himself is so clear that everyone who rejects or suppresses that truth is without excuse. As Paul unequivocally asserts here, no person can rightly claim ignorance of God and therefore no person can rightly claim that God's wrath or judgment against them is unjust. The truth is, it takes a concerted act of the will to deny that a vastly powerful God made and sustains the Creation.

Mankind is under the wrath of God because we actively suppress the truth and because we suppress the truth we then pervert the truth (vv. 21-23).

## **II. We are under the wrath of God because we pervert the truth          Rom. 1:21-23**

The opening phrase of verse 21 tells how perversion to idolatry initially came about. "*For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God or gave thanks...*"

They knew God existed but refused to worship God for who he is and rather reduced him to their own level through idolatry. They minimized the vast chasm between the creature and the Creator.

This resulted in a progressively degenerating idolatry. In verse 21b Paul says, "*their foolish hearts were darkened.*" Verse 22 says, "*Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.*" The root word for 'fools' is the same root from which we derive our word 'moron.' It is moronic, dare we say stupid, to exchange something of real worth (*the glory of God*) for something of no value (*an image*).

Verse 23 portrays the progressive degeneration that the perversion of idolatry brings. First they worshiped an image of a man, second birds, then quadrupeds, and ultimately reptiles—crawling things. You cannot go any lower than this.

Suppressing truth leads to perverting the truth which in turn leads to the perversion of life.

## **III. We are under the wrath of God because we pervert life          Rom. 1:24-32**

Three dimensions of life are mentioned: sensual, mental, and leadership/authority.

### **A. We pervert the sensual dimension of life          1:24-27**

Here we come to the first of three times where the phrase '*God gave them over*' is used (verses 24, 26, and 28).

Alan Ross: *There are several ways that this verb "gave them over" has been interpreted. (1) In the early Church Chrysostom took it in a permissive sense, that God permitted them to be given over. But that is not the force of the verb; it is far more active than that. (2) Another view is what we call the privitive sense, that is, God did not impel them to believe but withdrew His restraining hand, and by withdrawing his restraint the effect appeared that he was giving them up. Again, that idea may satisfy some by softening the meaning, but it is still not exactly what is being said. (3) The full explanation goes a little further, that is, it is judicial (which includes something of the privitive); God actively abandoned the race to judgment because it rejected the light (see Mark 4:12; Isaiah 6:8-11). (Lesson from [The Epistle of Paul to the Romans](#) sermon notes on Bible.org)*

The expression '*God gave them over*' does not mean that God has given up on saving such sinners. The point of this section is not to show that some men are '*unsaveably*' lost, but that all men are universally lost. But the grace of God and the work of Christ is greater than all our sins. Thus, while men are given over to sin, they may also be delivered from their sin.

Note the connective reasons for why God gave them over. In verse 24 "*Therefore*" goes back to the wherefore which as we have already seen is they actively suppressed the truth leading to idolatry therefore God gave them

over. Then, (vv. 25-27) having exchanged the truth of God for the lie... *for this reason...* God gave them over. Because they no longer saw fit to even acknowledge God he gave them over (v. 28). God wrought judicial judgment on mankind because mankind chose to suppress, ignore and rebel against God.

Note that the first cause of God giving them over is a result of idolatry. Humanism results in the dehumanization of each other – specifically sexual perversion – *bodies are dishonored*.

We know this refers to sexual perversion because of how Paul uses the concept of immorality as a sin against one's own body in 1 Cor. 6. *Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body but the immoral man sins against his own body.* (1 Cor. 6:18). This is the point in our text as well. The body that indulges in sexual impurity/immorality is itself dishonored; it is debased, disgraced and degraded.

How did mankind get to the place where he dishonored his own body? Note the beginning of verse 25. Most translations read "*exchanged the truth of God for a lie*". But in the text Paul uses the definite article "*the lie*". What would be "*the lie*"? I think it refers to the same lie that Eve succumbed to in the garden: "*you will be like God knowing good and evil*" Gen. 3:5. The same lie that Lucifer succumbed to in his fall "*...I will make myself like the Most High*" Isaiah 14:14.

The lie is that Lucifer, Eve, or anyone of us can be god. We are the masters of our fate. In believing the lie we create our own gods (*worship and serve the creature* v. 25). Gods that we can control and therefore '*be god*' making our own decisions and living our own lives all apart from the one and only true God.

The judgment continues in verse 26 with degrading passions.

The text is even more explicit in the original than in our English translations. The words used for "*men*" and "*women*" are literally "*male*" and "*female*," so that verses 26 and 27 really read like this:

*... for their females exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural and in the same way the males abandoned the natural function of the female and burned in their desire toward one another, males with males committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.*

'*Natural*' here means in keeping with how God has designed people, and '*unnatural*' refers to behavior that is contrary to how God has made us. How has God made us? Gen. 1 – male and female to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Sexual intercourse was intended for a husband and his wife, for no one else.

Why does Paul single out homosexuality then? Because it is so obviously unnatural, and therefore automatically underlines the extent to which sin takes mankind. Other sins are just as evil, but they are naturally evil. Homosexuality is a perversion because it uses sex for a purpose contrary to that for which God created and intended it (Gen. 1:28; 2:24).

I would also offer a brief word to those who are involved in homosexual inversion. It is not a sickness, but a sin, and that ought to be encouraging because there is a remedy for sin, whereas many sicknesses have no cure. The Scriptures indicate that homosexuality is a sin from which one can recover. 1 Cor. 6:9-11

## **B. We pervert the mental dimension of life**

**1:28-31**

Their ignorance of God was not due to a lack of opportunity to know him, but to their deliberate refusal. They preferred other things to the knowledge of God. And, because they rejected the knowledge of God, God gave them over. Literally, they were given over to a "*rejected mind*." The result, of course, is that they do things that are '*not proper*.' Their minds became quite unable to make trustworthy moral judgments.

In verses 29-31 Paul gives the specific dimensions of a depraved mind. This is the longest list of this type in the New Testament. Its purpose is to show the scope of social evils that result when God hands people over to a

depraved mind because they refuse to recognize him. Not all those who are without Christ have done all these things, but these kinds of things come most naturally to them. The tendency is for deeper and deeper decline.

### C. We pervert the authoritative dimension of life 1:32

Man reaches the nadir of depravity when he heartily applauds those who give themselves to sin. To delight in those who do evil, and you know it is evil, is a sure way to become even more degraded than the sinners' one observes. What a telling application this has on our media-captivated society. Millions sit in their living rooms watching debauchery, violence, deceit and many other vices—and applaud what they see! It makes little difference whether the vices are real or portrayed, the effect is much the same—an increasingly depraved mind on the part of the viewer. Approving another's sin or encouraging another's sin is a sign that life has reached its lowest dimension.

We Christians are not exempt from this. Satan knows that if he can get us to laugh at things we believe we would never do, our defenses will fall. Maybe someday our unwitting approval will give way to action. We need to be careful about what we watch and applaud.

### Conclusion

Let me summarize the text this way: *Why are we all under the wrath of God?* In the first part of this chapter, Paul explains that mankind follows a five-fold process in suppressing the truth:

**First**, he ignores God. He does not glorify him or give thanks to him. This is characteristic of our day. We act as though he does not exist and has nothing to do with our world.

**Second**, ignoring God leads to fuzzy thinking (v. 21b). Their ability to look at the world around them and to draw accurate conclusions about it—became futile.

**Third**, fuzzy thinking leads to moral blindness (v. 21c). *“Their heart is darkened”* meaning that the ability to make moral choices is shut off. Once you refuse to worship God not only is your thinking confused but so are your morals.

**Fourth**, moral blindness leads to idolatry (vv. 22-23). Since God designed us to be worshippers, once God is rejected, man will worship himself.

**Fifth**, idolatry leads to immorality of all kinds – dishonored bodies, degrading passions, depraved minds (vv. 24-32). When men lose God, they always lose themselves.

Hence all of mankind is under the wrath of God, without hope apart from the gospel.

In Ephesians 2 Paul paints a picture of the dimensions of man's depravity concluding with verse 3 – *we were by nature children of wrath even as the rest.* That however is not the end of the story for beginning in verse 4, *“But God being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions and sins, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...”*

Finally to avoid any of the indications of this downward spiral simply honor God as God and give thanks (v. 21).