

## The Wrath of God Revealed

### Romans 1:18–32 (ESV)

**CONTEXT:** We began our study a couple of weeks ago, being introduced to the Apostle Paul, who is writing from the city of Corinth in Greece to the saints who are in Rome. The church in Rome was (we observed) not established by Paul, nor Peter, nor likely any of the other Apostles of our Lord. But rather, the members of this church were likely among those who were converted on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem - hearing the preaching of Peter and the rest of the disciples.

They subsequently returned to the Imperial Capital of Rome and began gathering regularly on the Lord's day and pressing on as best they could in the faith. It is apparent that they were making great progress - Paul speaks of their faith being gossiped about around the world.

Though Paul greatly desired to visit the Saint in Rome, he had been prevented from doing so. Thus, he takes up his pen and parchment and sends his words where his body could not go.

This is likely the first authoritative letter the church in Rome received, specifically for them. Had others written to the church in Rome, Paul would likely have resisted doing so. It was his practice to avoid building upon the foundation of one of the other Apostles - he preferred to lay his own foundation (Romans 15:20).

So now he writes to the church in Rome to exposit and strengthen the Gospel they had so willingly received back at Pentecost. Last week, we looked at Paul's thesis statement.

#### **Romans 1:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

This week, he begins to elaborate on that Gospel. In doing so, he starts at the very place the Holy Spirit started when the Gospel was preached to them years earlier. He takes them back to a place of fear and trembling before the wrath of God. Luke tells us they were - **Acts 2:37 (ESV)** <sup>37</sup> ...cut to the heart.. at the preaching of Peter and they cried out, "What must we do?" Paul would take them back to that place. **He begins NOT with the good news, but with the bad.**

**ILLUSTRATION:** I heard about a man recently who was the nation's biggest baseball fan. In fact, the only reason he wasn't certain that he wanted to go to Heaven was that no one could tell him emphatically that there would be baseball in Heaven. So, each night he prayed for God to reveal to him whether or not there would be baseball in glory. Then one night as he prayed, his bedroom filled with light, and there in the doorway stood the great archangel, Gabriel. Gabriel said, "I have been sent in answer

to your prayer". The man answered, "Wonderful... finally I will know – is there baseball in Heaven?" Gabriel said, "Well, I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is, yes, there is indeed baseball in Heaven". The man said, "Wonderful! What's the bad news?" To which Gabriel replied, "You are pitching this Thursday".

***You cannot fully appreciate the good news of ROMANS 3 until you see the bad news of ROMANS 1.***

In the verse that follows, Paul takes on the role of a **prosecuting attorney** and builds his case against every man who ever lived, including you and me. There are 7 logical inferences in this passage marked by a conjunction:

- v. 18 — "**For** the wrath of God is revealed" (grounding the Gospel of v. 17)
- v. 19 — "**For** what can be known..." (grounding the charge of suppression)
- v. 21 — "**For** although they knew God..." (grounding the "without excuse")
- v. 24 — "**Therefore** God gave them up..." (the judicial consequence)
- v. 25 — "**Because** they exchanged..." (the reason for the giving up)
- v. 26 — "**For this reason** God gave them up..." (the escalation)
- v. 28 — "**And since** they did not see fit..." (the final judicial act)

So the goal is to logically bring a person to a place where they are without excuse, recognizing that they justly deserve God's wrath. Paul begins his case in verse 18:

**TEXT: Romans 1:18–32 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God - Paul begins by reminding them of the **WRATH** of God. That is, the settled, holy, righteous, judicial opposition of a pure God to all that is unholy.

***It is not the opposite of His love; it is the necessary expression of His love for righteousness. Perfect LOVE equally and perfectly produces an equal measure of wrath.***

**ILLUSTRATION:** To love children is to hate child abuse. To love life is to hate abortion. To love Alabama is to hate Auburn... you see the point. God's LOVE for holiness demands His Wrath against sin.

**NO WRATH** - A great number of people in modern society would reject the idea of God's wrath altogether - it is difficult for them to conceptualize an Angry God, a Wrathful Deity. "Not my God", they say.

**GNOSTIC WRATH** - Others prefer a **Gnostic** concept of God that would say, "Oh yes, the God of the Old Testament may have lost his temper at times, but that all changed in the New Testament. Let's be done with this threatening theology, this Hellfire and

Brimstone preaching”. Yet, that reveals to me, they have simply not read the New Testament - the wrath of God is directly stated or referred to over 100 times in the NT, and the clearest teachings we have on it come directly from the mouth of Gentle Jesus Himself.

**ESCATOLOGICAL WRATH** - Well, they might say, if the Wrath of God is a real thing - certainly it is not something we have to worry about today - perhaps at the end of time, way off in the distance somewhere God will Judge the world, but there is nothing to worry about now. But I would have you notice the next phrase in **Romans 1:18** - <sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God *is revealed* from heaven...

Notice the verb: “is revealed.” That is, present tense. Ongoing. Right now, as you sit in this sanctuary, the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven. This is not a threat reserved for the end of the age, though there is a final day of wrath coming. This is a present, daily, continuous disclosure of God’s settled opposition to evil.

**Jesus said it this way - John 3:36 (ESV)**

<sup>36</sup> Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but *the wrath of God remains on him.*

How is God revealing His wrath? We will see those categories in a moment, but for now, simply recognize that there are people in this state, this county, perhaps even in this auditorium, who are currently subjected to the wrath of God.

**WHAT HAS GOD SO ANGRY?** Paul gives two broad categories -

<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all **ungodliness** and **unrighteousness** of men.

- **Ungodliness** - Ungodliness speaks of our **vertical** rebellion. We have rejected the rule of authority of God.
- **Unrighteousness** - Unrighteousness speaks of our **horizontal** rebellion. Because we have rejected a relationship with God, our relationship with everyone else has been affected.

The 10 Commandments can be divided thus: the first table legislates GODLIENSS (Man to God Commands), the second table legislates RIGHTEOUSNESS (Man to Man commands).

God’s wrath is stirred against violations of both - we neither love God with all of our heart, nor do we love our neighbor as ourselves.

But not only do we violate, and as Paul says, “fall short” of the Glory of God, but notice verse 18.

<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, **who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.**

**ILLUSTRATION:** I probably have a touch of ADD. I am easily distracted. I have invested in a pair of Boze AirPods, which have a noise cancellation feature. Noise-canceling headphones are very clever: they cancel sound by adding sound. The core principle is called **destructive interference**. You see, Sound travels in waves. If you create a second wave that is the exact opposite (an “anti-wave”), the two cancel each other out.

That is what Paul says people do to the truth of God. Rather than embrace it and submit to it, Paul says they become **FUTILE IN THEIR THINKING**. They generate lies to counter the truth. Notice how it works -

19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

That’s the reality - deep down inside, people know more than they claim to know. But they don’t face the facts - because to do so brings them into account.

Paul says that there is a certain amount of knowledge of God that can be known by a man, simply by what theologians call “**natural revelation**”. That is by the created order - apart from scripture.

NOW - understand, Paul is not suggesting that a person can know everything that can be known about God by natural revelation. No, we need “**special revelation**” of scripture to come to a knowledge of the Gospel. But much can be discerned simply by creation itself. **What sort of things?**

20 For 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.

Two things in particular can be known about God through natural revelation: His eternal power and His Divine nature.

1. **His Eternal Power** - Whether you gaze through a telescope into the galaxy and study the untold myriad of stars and planets, or whether you look through a microscope and study the atomic structure of a cell in a blade of grass - the order, the precision, the logic, the self-sustaining nature of such things points to an infinitely wise, infinitely powerful, infinitely personal Designer.
2. **His Divine Nature** - That phrase means His “Godness”. Simply by observing nature, you will deduce that this being who is capable of producing all that we see is a being that is worthy of our worship. Throughout time and memorial, tribes of humanity on every continent, of every ethnicity, of every language, have come to that conclusion.

Now, as they deduce these self-evident realities, Paul is **not** suggesting that they have the potential of coming into a saving relationship with the Creator based on that

information alone. But, he is saying that they are able to discern enough about God, righteousness, and reality, in order to be **brought into account**. That is what is meant by - ***So they are without excuse.***

How have people historically responded to such natural revelation? They suppress the truth - they put on their noise-canceling spiritual headphones. They produce counterarguments and noise -

<sup>21</sup> For 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. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Paul arranges the ***declension deliberately***: when we failed to worship the immortal God → we worship mortal man → birds → four-footed animals → creeping things.

This is a downward spiral of worship. When man rejects the Creator, he does not ascend to something higher — he always descends to something lower.

This is how sinful man tends to respond to **Natural Revelation** - rather than worship the God who ***created***, he worships the ***creature***.

You see, if man worships the Creator who Himself is a personality, then man is ***accountable*** to that Creator. BUT, if man can replace the CREATOR with a CREATURE, man can ***set the terms of his religion***. In fact, just as God made man in His image. Man can produce a god in the image of fallen man. And we've done that throughout human history.

You see, man has no problem worshipping as long as he can set the terms of what is being worshipped.

- **Vague Spirituality** - that is why vague spirituality is so popular these days. A person may say, "I am not religious, but I am very spiritual". Yet, when you press them for what they mean by that, things get very odd. Does your spirituality ever correct you? Does it rebuke you? Does it redeem you? NO - it simply strokes your head and says, "You are such a good girl." Look at the pretty crystals and feel better.
- **Idolatry** - Others give the object of their worship definition and shape - they produce objects of worship. Yet, the most elementary principles of philosophy suggest that the lesser cannot produce the greater. The idols we produce are made in our image - they are subject to us. Read the ancient pagan myths, read of the Norse gods - they are lascivious, lewd, murderous...

David said it well in **Psalm 115:4–8 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. <sup>5</sup> They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. <sup>6</sup> They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do

not smell. <sup>7</sup> They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. <sup>8</sup> ***Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.***

- **Science** - But perhaps the greatest of the idols worshipped by modern man is the god of science. What does the science say? This is the word that thunders from the mountain. Yet, here is the problem - when you bow down and worship at the altar of science, like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, you will discover that behind the altar is a ***little old man, in need of saving himself***. Science is good, but it is not ultimate - for heaven's sake - the science has changed a dozen times in my lifetime. We need a north star - immovable in the Heavens by which to chart our life's course.

**NOW COMES THE JUDGEMENT, NOW COMES THE WRATH** - what is the wrath that abides on a man? What is the wrath that is already revealed from Heaven? It's there in verse 24 - As a result of man suppressing the truth in his idolatry...

<sup>24</sup> Therefore ***God gave them up*** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup> because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. <sup>26</sup> For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; <sup>27</sup> and 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.

**The first expression of God's wrath is...**

1. **Divine Desertion** - Three times, Paul says it. Remember the law of Repetition from Genesis?

<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them up in the ***lusts*** of their hearts to impurity...

<sup>26</sup> For this reason God gave them up to ***dishonorable passions***...

<sup>28</sup> ..God gave them up to a ***debased mind***...

There is a sense in which the Holy Spirit and the conscience of a man restrain evil. Yet, when God pours His wrath out on a people, the restraint is removed.

- A. **Desertion to Desire (v.24)** - The first evidence that someone is currently under the wrath of God is that they are mastered by their lust. Natural desires and drives no longer serve them to drive them toward a family and procreation - instead, they are at the mercy of their lust, and they are enslaved.
- B. **Desertion to Depravity (v.26)** - Paul explains that this is the root of every perversion.

Now, Paul didn't randomly grab the particular sin of sexual perversion - this is a ***discernible paradigm*** that cultures have followed from Sodom until now.

Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the history of Rome itself.

C. **Desertion to Delusion (v.28)** - this is the most terrifying aspect of God's wrath. The mind is allowed to actually buy the lie. You see, the natural order of things ought to be enough for you to see that these things are wrong - but they literally cannot see it. The wrath of God has fallen upon their reasoning faculties.

2. **Destructive Discord (vv.29–31)** - Notice that the list that follows speaks of the effect the wrath of God has on your relationships. Lest you think that sexual sin is the only evidence of God's wrath being revealed... notice this list:

<sup>29</sup> They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup> foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

You see, there are those who are subject to God's wrath who may be found in the darkest pervisions, and then there are those who simply spread gossip across Nassau County. Teenagers who cannot submit to their parents' authority.

And don't you understand - Paul is not warning you that if you do these things you will arouse the wrath of God, Paul is suggesting you are already experiencing it. It is abiding on you - that is why you cannot seem to change.

3. **Defiant Discipleship (v.32)** - This is the final phase; the sinner becomes an evangelist for evil.

<sup>32</sup> Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Since they have been morally abandoned and the restraining power of the Holy Spirit is taken away, and since their lives are marked by every type of conflict, NOW, **they need a congregation**, they need others to worship with them... so they become evangelists - they shared how nice it is to be handed over to evil, they post on social media how everyone else is an idiot who doesn't agree with them, and when they find another poor soul sinking under the wrath of God, they pile on.

This is something we must remember when we observe our friends and loved ones living out the sinful perversions Paul mentions - whatever else it may cost them, they will always have a community of people cheering them on.

**Notice how the wrath of God progresses - from vertical (God withdraws) to horizontal (relationships shatter) to multiplicative (others are pulled in).**

**CONCLUSION/INVITATION:** Paul begins the greatest of all epistles with the **BAD NEWS**. Yes, it is very bad. It is near unbearable. What hope does the poor soul on whom the wrath of God abides have? Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, knew not to let us walk down this dark path without hope... he has already declared the answer to God's wrath-

**Romans 1:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

**The Gospel of Christ can save from the guttermost to the uttermost!**

Remember where Paul was as he wrote this letter to the Romans? He was in the city of Corinth. If any city was filled with citizens who had been handed over to the wrath of God, it was Corinth. But listen to what Paul says to them - **1 Corinthians 6:9–11 (ESV)**  
<sup>9</sup> Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> ***And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.***

What happened to these Corinthians, what happened to the Romans, can happen to you. You see, the cross is the one time in human history we see the wrath of God full and completely poured out for all the world to see. In Gethsemane, Christ prayed, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me". That cup was the cup of God's wrath. Heaven was silent to Jesus plea, so that it doesn't have to be silent to your plea.

***But the cup of wrath will be drunk by Christ or by you.***