



Lesson 4

God's Wrath & Man's Unrighteousness

Romans 1.18-32

"For the *wrath* of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and *unrighteousness* of men..."

Romans 1.18

Romans 1:18–32 (NASB95)

18For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

19because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

20For 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, so that they are without excuse.

21For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

22Professing to be wise, they became fools,

23and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

24Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

25For they exchanged the truth of 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 over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,

27and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

28And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,

29being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,

30slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,

31without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;

32and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

God's Righteousness & His Wrath

1. Our text begins with the word “for,” which points us back to the point Paul just made. We see two parallel statements in vs. 17 and 18:
 - “the righteousness of God is revealed,” (vs. 17)
 - “the wrath of God is revealed,” (vs. 18)
2. As we noted in our last lesson, the righteousness of God is best understood in covenant context. That is God will always be loyal and faithful to his covenant promises. In the context of vss. 1-17 God's covenant promise was that of salvation in His Son, salvation to all who would respond in obedience of faith. Available to all, whether they be Jew or Gentile.
3. God's wrath is the other side of the coin and should still be viewed in the context of covenant. If God is righteous in keeping covenant with those who have faith in Him, what of those who broke covenant with Him through ungodliness and unrighteousness? Nothing is left for them, but His wrath.
4. Paul's point is that both God's righteousness and His wrath are currently being revealed. While it is tempting to see God's wrath as end-time judgment, that is not Paul's point in this passage. No, just as God's righteousness is currently revealed in the gospel, so is His wrath to those outside of His covenant. How is that wrath revealed? We shall shortly see.

Man's Unrighteousness

1. The term “unrighteousness” figures prominently in this passage (it occurs twice in vs. 17 and once at the head of a litany of sins in vs. 29). If God's righteousness has to do with His keeping of covenant, it follows that man's unrighteousness has to do with man failing to keep covenant.
2. However, the covenant under consideration is not the Mosaic covenant, but the covenant between Creator and creature.
3. It is a covenant based on what God has clearly revealed to all men: “His eternal power and divine nature,” (vs. 20). These are clearly seen by natural revelation and show the vast distinction between Creator (God) and creature (man).
4. Yet, this covenant is broken by man in that He forgets his Creator and takes for himself the preeminent position. This ungodly and unrighteous attitude of man is found throughout the section:
 - “men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,” (vs. 18)
 - “they did not honor Him as God or give thanks,” (vs. 21)
 - “exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man,” (vs. 23)
 - “they exchanged the truth of God for a lie,” (vs. 25)
 - “they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer,” (vs. 28)
5. In replacing the Creator with the creature man thought he was wise, but showed exactly how foolish he is! It was when man reversed the roles of Creator and creature that he departed into all of the sins listed in this passage. No wonder that God's wrath is being re-

vealed from heaven!

- 6. Special note:** while Paul is addressing the state of men in general, it seems likely that Paul's words found special application with the first man: Adam. What was Adam's (and Eve's) chief sin? That he desired God's position! (Genesis 3:5-6). This should be kept in mind when we discuss Adam's role in bringing sin into the world (Romans 5). As we will see, it was not that Adam's sin made all men guilty, but that he set the pattern of man placing himself in the position of God.

God's Wrath Defined: He Gave Them Over!

1. The phrase "God gave them over" is found 3 times in the text: vss. 24, 26, 28.
2. The phrase carries the sense of handing one over into another's control. I like the NLT's translation, "abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired."
3. This is the wrath of God that is being revealed! Not some punitive measure for every transgression, but the Creator allowing the creatures to suffer the natural consequences of their leaving Him!
4. Since man refused to honor God and give Him thanks (vs. 21), since man exchanged God's glory for his own (vs. 23), God gave man over to the lusts of his heart (vs. 24), to degrading passions (vs. 26). Since man refused to acknowledge God (vs. 28), He gave man over to his depraved mind resulting in all of the wickedness found in vss. 29-31.
5. The point: look around at sinful man. Look how far he has fallen without God's light and truth. That is God's wrath... He gave man exactly what he wanted, existence without God reigning in his life.
6. Finally note the phrase, "those who practice such things are worthy of death," in vs. 32. Returning to the Genesis narrative we recall God's warning that death would ensue when man broke covenant with God (Genesis 2:17). Death did ensue, both physical (Genesis 3:19) and spiritual (Genesis 3:22-24). If salvation is found in God, death is found outside of God. Again, this is how God's wrath has been revealed; we live in a world characterized by death, characterized by rejection of its Creator.

Remember Paul's Point: The Gospel Is For Such People!

1. The Jew thought of the Gentile world in exactly the terms outlined by Paul in vss. 18-32. For the Jew, he was deserving of God's righteousness (through keeping of Mosaic Law), while the Gentile world without Law was worthy only of wrath.
2. But Paul's point in vss. 1-17 was that the gospel of prophecy was one in which all men could be saved, both Jew and Gentile. That whoever would respond in obedient faith would become God's "called," "beloved," and "saint."
3. So, Paul's point in vss. 18-32 was not to denounce man, but to point out man's problem: he had left his Creator and was suffering the natural consequences of that rejection. What should man do? There is only one thing man can do: respond to the gospel in faith and experience God's covenantal righteousness (vss. 16-17)!

4. This perspective should be kept in mind when dealing with any person in sin. So we find the outright condemnation of homosexuality in vss. 26-27. Those words cannot be read without coming to the conclusion that homosexual practices are abhorred by God. However, Paul did not write them to pronounce judgement on the homosexual. He wrote them to show that such practices occur when man replaces the Creator's will with his own. But if man, including the homosexual, will return in obedient faith he is assured that the God who is righteous will save!