

The Book of Romans

Lesson 2: The Wrath of God Against Unrighteousness -- Romans 1:18-32

Imagine standing on a hillside at dawn, watching the sun spill over the horizon. The sky is on fire with color, the birds are waking, and the whole created world seems to be saying something. You feel it even if you cannot put it into words. There is a Maker, and He is glorious. Paul says every person who has ever lived has stood on that hillside in one way or another. The heavens declare the glory of God, and creation has been preaching a sermon about its Creator since the morning of the world. No one has missed it entirely. And that, Paul says, is exactly the problem.

Having just announced the best news in the world, that the gospel is the power of God for salvation, Paul now turns to show us why we need it so desperately. Before he can lift us up with grace, he has to tell us the truth about where we stand. The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth. That is not an easy sentence to sit with. We live in a time that prefers a God who only affirms and never opposes. But a God with no wrath would be a God who shrugs at evil, who looks at the wreckage of human cruelty and does not care. Paul's God cares, fiercely, and His wrath is the settled, holy opposition of a good God to everything that ruins what He made and loves.

Watch the tragedy Paul traces, because it is your story and mine before grace found us. People knew God, but they did not honor Him or give thanks. They exchanged His glory for images, His truth for a lie. And three times Paul says the most chilling words in the chapter: God gave them up. He let go of the rope. He allowed them to have what they insisted on wanting. The downward path of sin is not mainly God hurling thunderbolts; it is God sorrowfully removing His restraining hand and letting sin become its own punishment. By the end of the chapter we are looking at a culture that not only does evil but applauds it.

It would be easy to read this chapter pointing fingers at someone else, at that culture, those people, out there. Resist that. Paul is setting a trap, and it springs in chapter two. The list at the end includes not only the sins we love to condemn but the ones we quietly excuse: gossip, envy, pride, a lack of gratitude, disobedience to parents. Read these verses as a mirror, not a window. Let them do their hard, necessary work, so that when grace comes, you will know just how much you needed it.

Group Discussion: Paul says that creation itself reveals God's eternal power and divine nature, so that all people are without excuse (vv. 19-20). In a culture that increasingly says there is no way to know whether God exists, how does this passage challenge that claim, and why do you think people suppress what creation is telling them?

Personal Reflection: Paul says the human heart went wrong first not in scandalous sin but in failing to honor God and give thanks (v. 21). When was the last time your heart was truly

thankful to God? What does the level of gratitude in your daily life reveal about where your heart actually stands before Him?

Read Romans 1:18–32

Study Questions

1. Paul says, The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth (v. 18). What is the wrath of God, how is it different from human anger or mere temper, and why is a God who opposes evil actually good news rather than something to be embarrassed about?
2. Paul describes people who suppress the truth they actually know (v. 18). All of us are tempted to push down what we know to be true so we can keep doing what we want. Where in your own life are you tempted to suppress something you know God has made clear, and what do you tell yourself to keep that truth at arm's length?
3. Paul argues that God's invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived in the things that have been made, so that people are without excuse (vv. 19–20). What does this teach about how God has revealed Himself to everyone, and what does it mean that this leaves the whole human race without excuse?
4. Paul says they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator (vv. 23, 25). Idolatry is not only bowing to a statue; it is treasuring anything more than God. What created things are you most tempted to put in God's place, and how would your week look different if God truly held first place?
5. Three times Paul says God gave them up, to impurity, to dishonorable passions, and to a debased mind (vv. 24, 26, 28). What does it mean that God gave them up, and how does this teach us that sin itself becomes a kind of judgment when God removes His restraining hand?
6. Paul says that although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, and their foolish hearts were darkened (v. 21). Consider the connection Paul draws between ingratitude and spiritual darkness. How might a steady habit of thanksgiving guard your own heart, and what is one specific thing you can begin thanking God for daily?
7. Paul says they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever (v. 25). What is the lie that people exchange for the truth, and why does Paul treat false worship as the root from which all the other sins in this passage grow?
8. At the end of the chapter Paul lists sins we are quick to condemn alongside sins we often excuse: gossip, slander, boasting, envy, disobedience to parents, ruthlessness, a lack of love (vv. 29–31). Which of the so-called respectable sins on this list do you most easily tolerate in yourself, and why is it dangerous to rank sins so that our own feel acceptable?
9. This passage paints a sweeping picture of human sinfulness, including the exchange of natural sexual relations for those contrary to nature (vv. 26–27), set within a long catalog of unrighteousness that ends by noting that people not only do such things but give approval to those who practice them (v. 32). How does Paul describe the seriousness and the scope

of human rebellion here, how should the church hold both the truth about sin and genuine compassion for sinners (remembering that the gospel cleanses every kind of sinner, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11), and how does this dark picture prepare us to receive the grace Paul will unfold?

10. Look back across this sobering passage. Paul has shown you the wrath of God against sin, the witness of creation, the tragedy of exchanged worship, the downward pull of being given over to sin, and a humanity that approves of evil. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Romans 1:18–32 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 19:1–4, the heavens declaring the glory of God; Acts 14:15–17 and Acts 17:24–31, God’s witness to the nations and the call to repent; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, such were some of you, but you were washed and justified; Ephesians 2:1–5, dead in trespasses but made alive by God’s mercy; Colossians 3:5–10, putting to death what is earthly and putting on the new self