

The Wrath of God

Text: Romans 1:18-20

Introduction:

1. Paul has introduced the grand theme of the Gospel in 1:16-17. He introduces the theme of God's righteousness that is credited to the repentant sinner by faith. Paul expresses this truth extensively in chapter 3. It is also clearly outlined in the words of Philippians 3:4-9:
"Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, **And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:"**
2. This Section: 1:18-3:20 – The Universal Reign of Sin/Man's Condemnation. Sin, wrath and judgment occupy center stage. These verses prepare the way for the Gospel of God's righteousness. (Moo)
3. This Lesson: Paul announces the fact of God's wrath upon sinful men and the reasons for that wrath.
4. Note: The way Romans structures the doctrine of salvation is significant. It first establishes mankind's need (his sinfulness and guilt before a Holy God) before it unfolds the wonders of God's grace.

I. God's Wrath Declared (Vs. 18a)

A. Divine Wrath

1. Vs. 18 = like the heading for the whole section (1:18-3:20)
2. Note the phrases "of God" & "from heaven". God's Holy fury is distinct from anything known by man. It is just, holy wrath.
3. 'wrath' = word used most frequently to describe the Divine anger.
 - a. Refers to "the deep-seated anger of God against sin. An anger that arises from His holiness and righteousness." (Linguistic Key)
 - b. It is not the quick boiling up of anger (thumos) but an anger (orge) that builds until it finally bursts out in vengeance upon the object of its indignation (S. 2:5).
 - c. "The temper of God towards sin, not rage, but the wrath of reason and law." (RWP)
 - d. Same word is translated 'vengeance' in Rom. 3:5 & 'indignation' in Rev. 14:10. It is "*the wrath of Almighty God.*" (Rev. 19:15)

B. Present Wrath

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1. “is revealed” = present tense. God’s wrath is already upon sinful, unrepentant men
2. John 3:36 *“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”*
3. Col. 3:6 *“For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience:”*
4. Psalm 7:11 *“God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day.”*
5. The full manifestation of God’s wrath upon the unrepentant will be at the judgment. However, God’s judgment is still manifested at times even in this life. In Vs. 23-28 we see God as judge, responding judicially to man’s depravity. He gives them up, gives them up and gives them over.

II. God’s Wrath Directed (Vs. 18b)

Paul specifies the objects of God’s wrath:

A. Impiety – ‘ungodliness’

1. ‘all’ = comprehensive word. Covers all sin
2. ‘ungodliness’ = irreverence towards God, disrespect
3. Illustration: Ungodliness is the breaking of the first table of the 10 commandments which all have to do with our relationship to God.

B. Impurity – ‘unrighteousness’

1. Consequence of ungodliness. Lack of right conduct toward men, injustice. Follows naturally from irreverence. “The basis of ethical conduct rests on the nature of God and our attitude toward him, otherwise the law of the jungle.” (RWP)
2. A low view of God fruits in low morality. Irreverent attitudes and actions towards God lead to irreverent attitudes and actions towards men.
3. Illustration: Unrighteousness is the breaking of the second table of the 10 commandments which have to do with our relationship to our fellow man.
4. Application for believers: Do we have a biblical view of God that affects our conduct?

C. Ignorance – “hold the truth in unrighteousness”

1. ‘hold’ = compound word made up of ‘down’ & ‘hold’; refers to someone who “holds down” or suppresses the truth. It is willful ignorance (2. Peter 3:5)
2. Same word is used in Heb. 10:23 *“Let us **hold fast** the profession of our faith...”*

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3. “the truth” = truth concerning God’s Divine Person revealed through creation and conscience
4. ‘unrighteousness’ = the reason behind why they suppress the truth. To acknowledge the Creator God has implications for the way we live.

III. God’s Wrath Defended (Vs. 19-20)

These verses explain more specifically the reasons for God’s wrath stated in Vs. 18. The heathen are justly under the judgment of God as they have rejected the light God has given them through **conscience** and **creation**:

A. The Light of Conscience (19)

1. ‘because’ = gives reason for God’s wrath (Vs. 18)
2. “manifest” = made clear
3. “in them” = In their hearts and consciences (inner witness) S. 2:14-15 on the conscience
4. “shewed it unto them” = The heathen have the outer witness of creation. God has presented it before their eyes.

B. The light of creation (20)

1. “invisible things...clearly seen” = God has Revealed His invisible character and attributes in the physical universe He has created.
2. Note the words in these verses that demonstrate just how clearly God has revealed Himself in creation: ‘known’, ‘manifest’, ‘shewed’, “clearly seen: & ‘understood’.
3. “his eternal power and Godhead” = two specific things God has revealed about Himself.
 - a. Power – Even without the benefit of modern, scientific discovery, all one needs to do is look around at the Created Universe to conclude that the Almighty God must be All Powerful.
 - b. ‘Godhead’ = His Divine Nature. E.g. God of wisdom, God of order (laws speak of a lawgiver), God of beauty
 - c. Psalm 19:1-4 *“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world...”*
4. “without excuse” = without legal defence (no answer)

C. Challenge: If God holds men accountable purely on the basis of the light they have from creation and conscience, how much more accountable must those be who also have been blessed with the light of the Gospel. Consider how great God’s judgement will be against

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those who have been surrounded by light and rejected it. Remember Christ's words of warning:

1. Matt. 11:20-24 *"Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, **because they repented not**: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, **It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.** And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, **That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.**"*
2. Christ told the Pharisees that they would receive "the greater damnation" (Matt. 23:14)
3. Note also Heb. 6:4-9 ("For it is impossible for those...") & Heb. 10:26-31 ("For if we willfully...")

Conclusion:

1. Are you born again? Are you 100% sure you are saved?
2. Are we warning the lost to "flee from the wrath to come" (Matt. 3:7)