

3. ROMANS SERIES: The Plight of Man

Romans 1:18-32

After introducing us to the revealed gospel in Romans 1:16 and 17, Paul is now concerned to show the urgent need of that gospel. He does that by showing the awful plight of man because of sin, beginning with the Gentiles in Romans 1:18-32, then the Jews in Romans 2:1-3:8 and then finally all men in general in Romans 3:9-20. Because of sin all men are unable to obtain a favourable judgment from God.

That Paul speaks firstly of the Gentiles can be seen in the various thoughts contained within Romans 1:18-32, such as image worship (1:23) and general revelation (1:19,20). There is also a noticeable change toward the Jews in Romans 2:1,17.

Please Read Romans 1:18-32

The current passage under consideration begins with *'for,'* connecting it with the previous passage considered (1:1-17). The line of thought therefore runs something like, the gospel is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes because (*'for'*) the wrath of God rests upon man. In other words, this connection shows the great wickedness of man and his clear need of God's rescue package in the gospel as the only way to acceptance with God.

NOTE: INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY QUESTION HERE: Verse 18 says, *'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.'* How is the wrath of God revealed?

Verse 18: God's rescue package in the gospel is needed because God's settled indignation (as opposed to rage; *'wrath' - orge*) is set against man (Eph 5:3,6; Col 3:6; 1 Thess 1:10). This wrath is not just a future event at the last great day of the Lord, but is a present reality, being daily revealed in human experience (Gen 6-8; 19; Ex 6-12; Jn 3:36). Because this wrath is from God, it is said to be *'revealed from heaven.'*

God's wrath is revealed against the rebellion of man to His authority. The two terms of *'ungodliness and unrighteousness'* go together, with ungodliness pointing to a lack of reverence for and submission (Gen 2:17) to God, and unrighteousness a lack of reverence for His law, which is the fruit of men's lack of submission to God. Such rebellion finds its expression in the pushing down of the truth, that is in denying its voice by constant and settled rebellion as it seeks to silence an accusing conscience by removing the truth from the forefront of the mind (Ps 14:1; 53:1; Mk 6:20,26,27; Rom 2:15).

The truth here is the true knowledge of God as the context makes plain. Such suppression of the truth is an attempt to silence conscience as it screams guilty at man and as a consequence many find themselves battling various guilt related psychological problems.

NOTE: INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY QUESTION HERE: How does creation declare God's invisible attributes? Explain.

Verses 19,20: The reason man suppresses the truth is because they know that God is real, for He has clearly declared Himself to them even without Special Revelation, for He has done so by General Revelation. This is the reason why God's wrath abides upon men, because they deliberately reject the true knowledge of God, choosing rather *'ungodliness and unrighteousness'*.

How is this so? Verse 20 shows it to be so by the clear evidence of creation especially. Though God is invisible to man (Jn 1:18; Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17; Heb 11:27), His work is clearly visible being seen by all and it is this that bears overwhelming testimony to God (Ps 111:2; 139:14), and therefore removes all excuse from man (Gen 1; Ps 104; Amos 5:8). Though this knowledge is limited, it is none-the-less true knowledge and renders men inexcusable before God. It is not knowledge enough to save, but it is enough to render men guilty for not worshipping the true God. Not only is His eternal power (Gen 18:14; Ex 20:1,2; Deut 33:27; Dan 4:35) seen through this testimony, but *'Godhead'* indicates the entirety of His glorious attributes to some degree (Ps 8; 19:1-6; Is 40:21,22,26).

QUESTION: How should we regard creation, remembering that it portrays the invisible attributes of God?

Verse 21: Man is without excuse because they constantly suppress what they know and see constantly demonstrated through the testimony of creation. Man does not acknowledge God and certainly does not praise or thank Him, though God is good toward him. Rather men choose to speculate in their thoughts, seeking ways to eliminate God from their thinking and their foolish hearts become darkened. Because of this suppression of the true knowledge of God, spiritual blindness is now the result.

What is meant by all of this is mental dullness, despair and spiritual inability. Whatever

man feels, thinks, says, etc, is affected by this spiritual darkness.

Verse 22: All of man's faculties are so affected by this spiritual darkness, that though claiming to be wise, he has in reality become a fool (Ps 14:1). What has been achieved by man as a consequence of his suppression of the true knowledge of God, is the exchanging of the knowledge of the true God for various substitutes aimed at silencing his accusing conscience (eg evolution), which in the end will prove to be worthless.

Such foolishness has been seen in the history of the world, even up until the time of Noah when the true knowledge of God was almost completely lost in the world and God moved in wrath to punish such '*ungodliness and unrighteousness (1:18).*' This same process of suppression continues even to the present day and the time of judgment will come soon enough.

Verse 23: Man has traded all of the Divine perfection for nothing, forsaken the transcendent God and worshipped what the Almighty has made, the creature for the Creator.

The apostle in this verse follows the order of creation given in Genesis 1:20-25 to greater expose the folly of the exchange.

Verse 24,25: Because of man's foolish rebellion, God has abandoned him to his own sin. This is one aspect of God's revealed wrath (1:18). Though longsuffering, God will pour out His wrath. This verse shows a close connection between idolatry and sexual immorality. Because they have rejected God and replaced the true knowledge of God with worthless substitutes (Col 3:5), God has abandoned them to their own sinfulness. As a result man falls headlong into sexual immorality and all manner of perversions.

Though rebellious man substitutes the creature for the Creator, Paul expresses his satisfaction with his Creator, for this God has done so much for him. This verse shows a living relationship between Paul and God.

Verses 26,27: As a consequence of his rebellion, God abandoned man to sexual immorality and especially to homosexual sin. In this, humanity suffers the just wrath of God against it, for humanity suffers all the consequences of such perverted practices.

QUESTION: What are some of the consequences that humanity suffers as it degrades itself in homosexual perversions?

Verse 28: Because man rejects the true knowledge of God, God has abandoned man to a wicked mind, to commit practices that are not right - for they are no longer able to perform what is right.

Verses 29-31: These verses catalogue the practices man commits because of a wicked

mind devoid of true wisdom. These practices were common in Paul's day and in our day the same sinful practices are present as a result of being led by such a wicked mind. These sins are all opposed to the laws of God and include sexual sin, selfishness, greed and covetousness, murder, and the list goes on, covering every possible area of life. Man is totally corrupted by sin.

Verse 32: Even though man knows God's right and wrong, has a conscience that still accuses and also knows that God punishes sin (1:21; 2:14,15), he yet continues to practice the wickedness catalogued in the previous verses. Not only does he practice this wickedness, but he also praises those who also do so. Quite possibly this is done in yet another effort to silence conscience by the company of other evildoers.

QUESTIONS: How should we respond to those experiencing the wrath of God?

How should our evangelism reflect the teaching of Romans 1:18-32?

INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

In what way does Romans 2:24 also reflect upon Christianity? What does this verse actually mean?

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