

The Book of Romans

By Doug Hamilton

Romans 1:18-32 “Understanding The Wrath of God”

Romans 1:18-20 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.²⁰ For 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.

In the previous text Paul discussed the righteousness of God. He connected it to the gospel of Jesus Christ. He will not be back into his discussion about righteousness until later in 3:21. In this section we are introduced to the *wrath of God*. There is much to be said in this passage about the wrath of God in contrast to the righteousness of God.

There was a common phrase in the Greco-Roman world called “*wrath of the gods*”. It was an impersonal force of the Cosmos which would erupt upon the culture for no particular cause, bringing destruction, health crisis and financial devastation to a people. To avoid this situation the pagans were encouraged by the philosophers to “*avoid the wrath of the gods*” through the keeping of a tight list of rules, including a series of sacrifices meant to fend it off.

Paul appears to be using this concept to explain the *wrath of God* that can be brought forward in the lives of people who *suppress the truth in unrighteousness*. It is not an impersonal, but a personal interaction with the Creator of the universe. What is the catalyst for the wrath of God? If *righteousness* is found in the truth of the gospel (1:17), then the suppression of the truth would be unrighteousness (1:18). If the foremost brings the blessing of God, then the latter brings on His wrath.

What is the truth of the gospel which is being suppressed? It is the evidence that there is a Creator of not only the universe, but also of us. We are reminded in *Heb 11:3* “*By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God...*” Not one single person witnessed the creation account. God asked in *Job 38:4* “*Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?*” The answer is NOBODY. Though nobody witnessed the creation account, we cannot ignore the fact that it is all here and is more complex than we could ever imagine. From the simplest molecular structure all the way to the most complex DNA in the cosmos and everything in between, we cannot deny that it is here, it is amazing and cries out to discover the intelligence behind it. We are *fearfully and wonderfully made* (Ps 139:14).

We can pretend that “something came from nothing”, that “order came from chaos” and that “organic life came from inorganic material”, but deep down inside we know that it defies simple logic. As the Apostolic Father Tertullian stated, “*It was not the pen of Moses that initiated the knowledge of the Creator... ‘Nature’, he said, ‘is the teacher; the soul is the pupil.’*” William Barclay summarize in his Romans commentary, “*Break the laws of agriculture—your harvest fails. Break the laws of architecture—your building collapses. Break the laws of health—your body suffers.*” Nature teaches us that there is a natural order to the cosmos.

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Computers, automobiles, research papers, buildings and college campuses do not simply form by accident, yet the universe did? Give me a break! Common sense simply will not allow intelligence to accidentally happen. *His invisible attributes, eternal power and divine nature is clearly seen* (1:20), so all thinking humans are without excuse.

Creation is the base of every gospel presentation ever given, for without a Creator, there can be no creation. This is what sets humankind on the course of inquiry to learn more about this Creator. This is why we often see gospel presentations from the New Testament inclusive of creation from the core.

- Acts 4:24 "...O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM..."
- Acts 14:15 "...We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you in order that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them."
- Acts 17:24-29 "The God who made the world and all things in it..."

To ignore the creative force in the universe is to become *willingly ignorant* (2 Pet 3:5) of all common sense concerning the *wrath of God*. Ignore the natural order and the *wrath* will soon follow.

The Denial of the Base of the Gospel

Romans 1:21-23 For 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. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and 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.

Man is narcissistic in nature, not wanting to do that which takes the focus off themselves. In light of this nature and in acknowledgment of the evidence of a Creator there are two actions used to avoid this egotistical mindset.

- A. Honor to the Creator: This is the Greek word for magnifying, praise and glory. Just seeing the greatness of the universe and all that it holds should cause oneself to glorify the Creator. It is in the glorification of the Creator that puts us into our proper puny and humble perspective. When there is praise focused on the Creator, then the created can never be exalted.
- B. Thankfulness to the Creator: In order to be thankful, there must be someone to thank. When people take inventory of their blessings in light of the Creator, they will naturally take their minds off "self" and put it on the One who blessed them. The thankful man can never be a narcissist.

If one would like to bring about the *wrath of God*, then simply allow them to suppress the evidence of the Creator by stifling the glorification and thankfulness of the same. There are three stages of the *wrath of God* which will be carried out in sequential order against a society.

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The Three Stages of the Wrath of God

1) God giving them over to IMPURITY.

Romans 1:24-25 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.²⁵ For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

The word that Paul uses for *impurity* is *akatharsia* and denotes “uncleanness”. In context it was the deep lust to satisfy the deep fleshly needs that the Creator built into our biology. The Stoic philosophers of Paul’s day defined these lusts as reaching out for pleasure “*which defies all reason*”. We must remember that built into our biology from the inception of creation are certain needs. They are spelled out in Genesis 1:28-29.

A. We have a built-in desire to reproduce: “*Be fruitful and multiply*”

This is not referring to buying a calculator and opening a fruit stand, but sex. This is one of the most basic needs which we possess. Before there was one single biology class taught, there was reproduction among the human race.

B. We have a built-in desire to rule: “*rule over every living thing that moves on the earth.*” It is in man to want to dominate in nature. Domesticated animals, circuses and safari hunts all point to the fact that man heads up the animal kingdom.

C. We have a built-in desire to replenish: “*it shall be food for you*”

We do not run on solar power, but food and water. It is consistently necessary for us to replenish our bodies with calories and nutrients in order to continue in this life.

We are given over to impurity when we begin to *defy all reason* in our pursuit of these built-in needs, then violation of the creation evidence brings about the natural wrath of God.

2) God giving them over to DEGRADING PASSIONS

Romans 1:26-27 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,²⁷ and 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.

The word which Paul uses for *degrading* is *atimia* and refers to “*vile passions*”. How are these passions different from impurity? They are passions which defy the very biological nature which was built-in to creation itself. It is an unnatural desire which goes well beyond “*be fruitful and multiply*”, but simply for the act itself. Women sleeping with women and men burning in their passion towards each other. This flies in the face of the Creator, ignoring the fact that there is a 100% infertility in these unions.

Even though standards of the Jewish perspective on morality had slipped by the first century, their standards were incredibly higher than the rest of the world. According to the Sybilline Oracles (3.594–600) the Jewish viewpoint on sexual sin is summarized in the following way: “*Surpassing, indeed, all humans, they [Jewish men] are mindful of holy wedlock and do*

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not engage in evil intercourse with male children, as do Phoenicians, Egyptians, and Romans, spacious Greece and many other nations, Persians, Galatians, and all Asia, transgressing the holy law of the immortal God.”

This is the second phase of a dying culture inheriting the *wrath of God* and we are deeply entrenched in this as a culture. Unless we learn from history and influence society enough to reverse it, the third and final phase of the wrath will be unleashed with devastating consequences.

3) God giving them over to a DEPRAVED MIND.

Romans 1:28-32 And 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, ²⁹ being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; ³² and 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.

The word used for *depraved* is *adokimos* and refers to that which is tested and approved by the culture. It is the complete outpouring of all that is unholy in the eyes of the Creator. It violates the core for which a successful society can stand. Complete narcissism reigns and the “*love your neighbor*” concept is dead. We could well be on our way to this at the present time. It appears in an egotistic society of Facebook, Twitter and selfies that we have lost our soul. The only thing left for the nation is to fully embrace the wrath until we are fully consumed. When the *hearty approval* becomes the norm, then the wrath of God will be complete and you will only have a citizenship of heaven (Phil 3:20) in which to find security. The scariest part of all is this realm is the warm up for an eternity in hell for those whom embrace it.

Conclusion:

It is our job to spread the message of Christ to be effective in the spiritual war which is around us. This is where we left off in the last lesson concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the end the only thing that matters is if we are a citizen of heaven or part the dying world receiving the wrath of God. If we will commit to Jesus Christ through His gospel and continue therein, we can be assured to avoid His wrath in the afterlife. The blessings of God through the gospel or the wrath of God through suppression of it is the choice. Choose wisely.