

GOD'S WRATH REVEALED
ROMANS 1:18-19

It is clear that the world hates God. God's morality is mocked. His truth is ignored. His commands are violated. Christ is scorned. What Jesus told his disciples in the first century is still true of both Him and us today — "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you" (Jn. 15:18). Yes, the world hates God — the only true God of absolute truth revealed in Scripture.

And this hatred of God is often expressed in the ridicule of God's judgment. While many argue against it, supposing that a loving God cannot also be wrathful, perhaps even more ridicule it with cartoonish figures lampooning His wrath — these drawings generally depict an old, weak, hooded, senile looking man carrying a placard declaring, "The end is near!" only to have some mocking punch line given below the picture. And the entire process is designed to minimize the wrath of God: it's not coming, it can't come (because God is too weak and senile), don't worry...

But as we read Scripture in general and as we come to the middle of Romans 1, there is one clear and inescapable fact and those who ignore it do so to their eternal peril:

THE WRATH OF GOD IS COMING.

In the two verses of Romans 1:18-19, Paul reveals four truths about the coming wrath of God —

1. **The Wrath of God is REVEALED (v. 18a)**
2. **GOD Reveals God's Wrath (v. 18b)**
3. **God's Wrath is Against UNRIGHTEOUSNESS (v. 18c)**
4. **God's Wrath is REASONABLE (vv. 18d-19)**
 - ✓ It is reasonable because truth is SUPPRESSED
 - ✓ It is reasonable because truth is KNOWN
 - ✓ It is reasonable because GOD revealed His truth

1. The Wrath of God is **REVEALED** (v. 18a)

- As we begin, notice that v. 18 begins with the connective word **for** (“because”). Paul is relating the truth about God’s wrath and sinfulness of ungodly Gentiles to what he said about the gospel (v. 17).
 - ✓ God’s wrath is a form of the justice/righteousness of God (v. 17) — it’s His retributive justice, wherein He punishes those who are not righteous and who have not been declared righteous by God.
 - ✓ It is because of man’s sinful rebellion against God that man is unrighteous and unable to redeem himself. Man’s sin means that the gospel is necessary, for nothing else can save man from God.
 - ✓ So it is natural for Paul to move from his declaration of imputed righteousness in v. 17 to the stark reality of the wrath of God in verse 18. In that transition, Paul demonstrates the necessity of imputed righteousness. In a sense, he “gets the readers lost so that they can be saved.”
 - ✓ And the first thing he says about the wrath of God is that it is revealed.
- When Paul says **revealed**, it is in the present tense, meaning there is a continuation to that revelation.
 - ✓ The normal sense would be, “it is continuing to be revealed,” or “it is regularly revealed.”
 - ✓ So the question is whether the wrath of God is *now* being revealed (manifested, carried out), or whether it is already a completed act (like the judgment, “*gave* [past] them over” in vv. 24, 26, 28), or whether it is something in the future (as in the wrath to be carried out in “the day of the Lord”).
 - ✓ The Scriptures are clear that there is a coming judgment for all unbelievers at the end of time (e.g., Rom. 2:5, 8; 3:5; 9:22; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; 1 Thess. 5:9), so there certainly is a sense in which the wrath is yet future. However, Paul uses the same verb **is revealed** in verse 17 to indicate ongoing historical revelation of the righteousness of God, so it should have the same force in this verse. Paul intends to connect the gospel and the imputed righteousness of Christ (v. 17) to the wrath of God (v. 18).
 - ✓ This is a reminder that there are a various forms of God’s wrath both now and in the future —
 - Cataclysmic wrath (e.g., natural disasters; Gen. 18-19; Is. 45:7; 47:10-11; Lam. 3:38)
 - Abandonment wrath (e.g., Hos. 4:17; Rom. 1:24-28)
 - ... These are both examples of God’s wrath in history — God judging men for their sin on earth before they die and face eternal wrath.
 - ... One writer has said, “The history of the world is the judgment of the world.”
 - Last days wrath — “the day of wrath” or “day of the Lord” (Rev. 6:15-17; Rev. 16)
 - Eternal wrath (Mt. 3:12; 8:12; Rev. 14:9-11; 20:15)
 - Redemptive wrath (2 Cor. 5:21; Is. 53:4-5), or wrath against Christ (Mt. 27:45-46) — this is the supreme revelation of God’s wrath. How angry is God with sin? He is angry (and gracious) enough to pour out His wrath on the only One who can absorb that wrath, His Son. This is how great His wrath is. And this is His own provision for escaping that wrath. And if you are a Christian, this is how you came to life!

- We should also note that when Paul says ***the wrath of God is being revealed*** he means it is known. We will see more of this in v. 19, but no one will ever have an excuse, “I didn’t know about God’s wrath.” It has been revealed well enough that there should be an impetus in all men to repent (Acts 17:25, 30-31).
 - ✓ It is also a grace that God’s wrath has been revealed, because without the revelation of God’s wrath, there is no impulse to repent and receive the forgiving grace of God and His righteousness (v. 17).
 - ✓ This is another demonstration of the importance of preaching all the facets of the gospel — the gospel doesn’t begin with grace; it begins with wrath and wrath then produces a need for grace and repentance. Without the bad news of the gospel, the grace of the gospel isn’t understood.

2. **GOD Reveals God’s Wrath (v. 18b)**

- When Paul says, ***the wrath of God is revealed***, it is implied that since it’s God’s wrath, He reveals it.
- But then Paul also adds that it is revealed ***from Heaven***.
 - ✓ There is some debate about what he means by that — in what way is it revealed from Heaven?
 - ✓ It is probably simplest and easiest to understand that the wrath of God is really from God — it’s Paul’s way of underlining, highlighting, and emphasizing that this is God’s wrath and His revelation.
- This is important because it emphasizes God’s right to carry out His wrath — this wrath is in accord with the righteousness and holiness and grace of Heaven. And it also denotes His sovereignty — He is able to carry out this wrath because He is the ruler of Heaven. The King of the greatest and only eternal kingdom has a right to rule over all men — even carrying out His wrath on them.

3. **God’s Wrath is Against UNRIGHTEOUSNESS (v. 18c)**

- God’s wrath is not an indiscriminate wrath. It is poured out against one thing specifically: sin.
 - ✓ Paul identifies sin in two ways in this verse: God’s wrath is against ***all ungodliness*** and ***unrighteousness***. But because he uses the word ***all*** to relate to both words, it means he is really talking about one thing — sin. God’s wrath is always (and only) against sin. And He is against every sin; there is nothing/no one that is ungodly or unrighteous that will escape God’s wrath (**3:10ff**).
 - ✓ The word ***ungodliness*** refers to that which is against or without God/godliness. The essence of sin is to get rid of God — “if I can be ‘god,’ then I can do anything I desire...” Sin is life without God. One has no rule or guide in his life that is stable; he is uninterested in pleasing God; he only lives self-indulgently. And this is the life of every unbeliever and this was our life before Christ (**Eph. 2:12-13**). If you are a believer in Christ, don’t ever forget that this was what you were.
 - ✓ The word ***unrighteousness*** refers to things that are against righteousness/justice. These are acts of evil and wickedness. They are the things that are “wrong.” (We used the word “ugly” with the girls.)

- ✓ It is also possible (likely) that these two words refer to our primary relationships — **ungodliness** is the relationship of the unbeliever to God; **unrighteousness** is the relationship of the unbeliever to his fellow man. From Heaven to earth, everything the unbeliever does is in selfish rebellion against God. And we might also say that because a man is ungodly it naturally follows that he is unrighteous. Why do people do wicked things to one another? Simply because they are ungodly — they reject God.
- ✓ “The basis of ethical conduct rests on the nature of God and our attitude toward Him...” [AT Robertson]
- Notice also that Paul says God’s wrath is against all **unrighteousness of men**. That is, God is opposed to unrighteousness in both Jews and Gentiles — He is wrathful against every expression of sin in every rebel against Him. There is no one righteous (3:10ff), so that everyone is accountable to God (3:19).
- If you are not a Christian, this is your status in the world. You may have a prestigious education and a fine position and perhaps you’ve married well. But if you are not a Christian, God is opposed to you and is pouring out His wrath against you. And you cannot stand (6:23 — the wages of sin is death). Note Hab. 3:8-15 — this is small portion of the power of the wrathful God. You will be judged and you will not make it. Your only hope is a righteousness that is not your own (v. 17). Your only hope (and my only hope) is to trust in Christ, believing that He sufficiently absorbed God’s wrath, freeing us from sin’s penalty and liberating us from sin’s power so that we can (and want to) do things that please Him.

4. God’s Wrath is **REASONABLE** (vv. 18d-19)

- Many assert that God’s wrath isn’t fair — “it is against His character and love; it is wrong.”
- It is reasonable because truth is **SUPPRESSED** (v. 18d)
 - ✓ God has revealed truth to men so that they might be free (Jn. 8:31-34).
 - ✓ Truth is not just an intellectual idea that we affirm mentally; truth is something to be done and obeyed. So when people act sinfully, it reveals their rebellion against God and God’s truth.
 - ✓ And this truth is a standard that can be measured; every action can be evaluated whether it conforms to truth or not. All actions and words are either truth or falsehood.
 - ✓ And unbelievers willingly, intentionally, and purposefully **suppress** the truth. On occasion we’ve had to take a cat to the vet; and when we got our first cat, we only had cardboard boxes. Have you ever tried to keep a cat in a cardboard box? It’s not easy! You have to force the lid down and weigh it down. And that is exactly what unbelievers attempt to do with the truth. They try to hold it down.
 - ✓ In their attempt to **suppress the truth**, unbelievers attempt to bury it out of sight, obliterate it from their memory, mock it so its reality seems less real, sin against it, and ignore it. But this is always only an attempt. Like the cat in the cardboard box, the truth is coming out; it’s vanity to try to suppress it.
 - ✓ “Unrighteousness is so much a part of man’s nature that *every* person has a built-in, natural, compelling desire to suppress and oppose God’s truth.” [MacArthur, 67.]

- ✓ So when God's wrath comes against those who have attempted to suppress the truth, it's not unjust. They've known the truth; they have just not wanted to follow it. So their condemnation is just.
- ✓ Like someone who was speeding through a posted school zone while talking on his cell phone, the truth was known and the resulting penalty is just. God's wrath against such people is reasonable and right.

- It is reasonable because truth is **KNOWN** (v. 19)

- ✓ Paul relates v. 19 to the revealed wrath of God in v. 18 — God is just when He pours out His wrath on these sinners **because** that which is known about God is evident. This expands what Paul said at the end of v. 18 — God is angry with sinners because they suppress the truth, and *because the knowledge of God is evident*. That is, they have no excuse.
- ✓ The sense of the word **known** is probably not so much that God is known, but that He *can* be known. They might ignore the truth about God and they might rebel against Him and His truth, but they can know all that they need to know to be obedient to Him.
- ✓ This truth about God can be known because it is **evident within them**. The preposition **within** can be translated “among,” and that's probably the better sense here: Paul isn't stressing that the truth of God is within them individually (though that is true also in that each man has a conscience), but he is stressing that all around them in this world is evidence of the truth of God. “In their midst and all around them and also in their own creaturely existence...God is objectively manifest: His whole creation declares Him.” [Cranfield, 114] This is what Paul emphasizes in vv. 20ff.
- ✓ The heavens declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1); those who do not hear that truth are deaf to it only because they have closed their ears to it themselves. They don't want to hear and know.
- ✓ It is on this principle that Paul addressed the Athenians in Acts 17:23ff — God has been revealed and they knew something about Him; they just didn't want all the truth about Him to change them.
- ✓ This is our world as well —

- It is reasonable because **GOD** revealed His truth

- ✓ All men can know that truth because it is all around them in creation **for God made it evident to them**.
- ✓ That is God, who was not obligated to do so, deliberately self-disclosed Himself to the world. He *wants* the world to know Him and obey Him.
- ✓ “Every person has a witness of God, and therefore, every person is accountable to follow the opportunity to respond to Him in faith.” [MacArthur]
- ✓ People will say, “Prove the existence of God to me.” To which we can confidently say, “We don't have to. There is nothing to prove. Your problem is not that you don't have proof, but that you don't want to believe. You just don't want God. He has given ample evidence of Himself.”
- ✓ Now this is not to say that God has revealed everything about salvation and redemption in creation so that one can be saved by looking at creation. But Paul *is* saying that nobody can say, “I didn't know about God.” God has revealed enough truth about Himself in the world to righteously condemn everyone in the world; no one is excused. They all willfully rejected God and embraced sin.

- So God's wrath is reasonable because of the revelation of His truth. He has declared His truth to the world and the unbelieving world has suppressed that truth, though the truth was revealed by God all around them. Every day they had multiple manifestations of the truth of God and they rejected God. So God is just when He condemns them. His wrath *is* reasonable and right.

CONCLUSION: One writer has summarized this verse and section well —

"...this list of Paul's is as accurate a description of life today as it was then. What more perfect account is possible of our sex-ridden mentality, leading as it has done to promiscuity, infidelity, divorce and the moral muddle of present-day society? Life has become loud and ugly, decency and chastity are almost regarded as signs of weakness and incomplete development. Everything is justified in terms of self-expression, and the more animal we are the more perfect we are."

Those words were first spoken by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in a sermon in...1941. [*The Plight of Man and the Power of God*, 70.] What was true in Paul's day was true in Lloyd-Jones' day and is true in ours. Man has rejected and suppressed the truth of God. He has revealed Himself to them, and it is true that judgment is coming. Mock it, argue against it, suppress it, ignore it, if you will. But you and I cannot change it. The wrath of God is coming. And it is just.

BENEDICTION: Romans 16:25-27.