

ROMANS: One Verse at a Time

Romans 1:18-20

God's Wrath on Unrighteousness

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

²⁴ Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. ²⁷ Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

²⁸ And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; ²⁹ being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, ³⁰ backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹ undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; ³² who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

¹⁸ For the **wrath of God**

The **wrath of God** is an unpopular subject today among Christian authors and preachers. Paul had no such aversion. Before declaring the **means** and **benefits** of salvation, Paul clearly demonstrated from what men need to be saved and **why**. “All have sinned” and “the wages of sin is death” precedes

“the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom. 3:23, 6:23). The bad news that we are sinners **justly** condemned comes before the good news that God, in love, grace, and mercy, offers to save us from our sin.

The word **wrath** means an **established**, determined indignation as opposed to a fleeting, **emotional**, or uncontrolled anger. The whole of Scripture declares the reality of the wrath of God.

God pronounced a death sentence on Adam and Eve and **cursed** the world in which they lived as a result of their sin. God destroyed all mankind except Noah and his family because “**every** intent of their heart was only **evil** continually.” God confused the language of sinful men building the Tower of **Babel** and scattered them across the face of the earth. He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, Pharaoh and his armies, and even sent His own children into **exile** because of their sin.

Neither is the **wrath of God** confined to the Old Testament. The New Testament does not mask the severity of God’s wrath nor mute its proclamation. Jesus warned of **fiery** hell (Mt. 5:22) and told people it was better to have a limb **cut off** than be cast into hell. (Mt. 5:28-29) He told of the rich man who went to hell. (Lk. 16:19-31)

Jesus clearly juxtaposed salvation with **condemnation**.

John 3:16-18

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not **perish** but have **everlasting life**. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to **condemn** the world, but that the world through Him might be **saved**.

¹⁸ “He who believes in Him is **not condemned**; but he who does not believe is **condemned** already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 3:36

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but **the wrath of God** abides on him.”

Paul warned in 1 Corinthians 16:22 “If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed...”

God is **perfect** in His every attribute. A part of His character, revealed by His Word, is that He perfectly **loves** righteousness. An equal part of His character, also revealed in His Word, is that He perfectly **hates** evil.

¹⁸ For the wrath of God

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The wrath of God is revealed, or **constantly** being manifested or demonstrated. The examples already cited from Scripture are only a few of the examples given in Sacred Text of how the wrath of God came **from heaven** and fell upon wicked men. We are often too quick today to declare that **disasters** and evil happenings are not the result of God's wrath. Jesus taught that **sometimes** they are not, but **sometimes** they are.

God's wrath is not selective nor partial. It is **against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men**.

Ungodliness indicates a lack of **reverence** for God, a lack of devotion to God, or a lack of **worship** of God. Jude records the words of the ancient prophet **Enoch** who proclaimed that the Lord would come to execute judgment on all the **ungodly** for all of their ungodly works, deeds, and words against the Almighty.

Unrighteousness is almost a **synonym** for ungodliness, but unrighteousness focuses on the **result** and the action whereas ungodliness focuses on the heart **attitude**. Ungodliness always leads to unrighteousness, and unrighteousness is always the **result** of ungodliness.

Both come under the heading of **"sin,"** and all are guilty. The only thing God hates is sin, but sin always brings the **wrath** of God. That is why Jesus had to die, to suffer God's wrath for us.

who **suppress the truth in unrighteousness,**

¹⁹ **because what may be known of God is manifest in them,**

for God has shown *it* to them.

God has shown *it* (the knowledge of God) to them.

There is a near universal question asked at this point by both Christians and non-Christians: How can a just, righteous, loving, merciful God pour out His wrath on people who have had no **opportunity** to know the truth about Him? How can He condemn people to hell for not trusting in Jesus when they have never heard the **gospel** or even the name of the Savior?

In the final clause of this sentence and the explanation of it that follows, God gives a clear and convincing answer. For not only are people ungodly and unrighteous, they also **suppress the truth in unrighteousness**. These words can be rendered “**constantly** are suppressing the truth by **persisting** in their sin.” The problem is not that men and women know nothing of God and truth; the problem is that they hide the truth from themselves and others because they **love** sin. **John 3:19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.**

And now Paul (and the Spirit) **prove** that this is the case, that all people everywhere have **sufficient** opportunity to know God and the truth.

What may be known of God is manifest in them means literally “**clearly** known” in them. In other words, this knowledge of God is both clearly revealed and **inside** of them, because **God has shown *it* to them**.

How has God done this? **God has shown *it* to them** (namely the knowledge of God), by revealing Himself through **creation**.

²⁰ For since the creation of the world

The awe inducing **nature** of the created order has been present for every person to observe **since the creation of the world**. Even the men and women who lived long before our modern scientific age could look into the expanse of the night sky and have their breath drawn away in fascination and wonder. Those who observed more carefully noted patterns in the movement of the stars; heavenly bodies shifting in **orderly** progression.

On the earth, the same order, beauty, and **intricacy** was also seen, literally everywhere. The pear tree bloomed and produced its fruit. Inside the fruit were seeds. Inside the seeds was a white mass, mixed with browns. But if the seed were left intact, when dropped into the ground and watered, it grew into a replica of the tree that bore it!

Even before some of the workings of the universe began to be understood, the observation of these wonders produced a common question: “**Who** made these things?” The clear evidence of design caused them to ask, internally if not externally, “Who is the **Designer**?”

Modern technology and scientific understanding has not reduced the mystery but **increased** it. We understand something of how a tree replicates itself by plant **DNA** stored in the cells of a seed that then instructs those cells to reproduce and manufacture all of the other types of cells needed to make the tree, and to do it in a logical progression that allows it to move from seeding to a mature tree. But our

His invisible *attributes* are **clearly seen**,

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even His eternal power and Godhead,

understanding does not diminish our fascination, nor does it answer the question. Now we ask, “Who put all the **information** coded into DNA into the chemical composition of the molecule?” Our common sense understanding that the source of that information must be **greater** than the information encoded means that it must be far beyond human ability, for we cannot even fully understand the code, much less create one on our own.

So, here is the point, Paul says. The invisible **attributes** of God, especially His eternal power and **deity**, are **clearly seen** by means of the things that God has made. The revelation of His own divine nature and majesty is not only for the astute, but for **everyone**. The revelation is **clearly seen**. This is what David was speaking of when he wrote, **Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.**

What happens when a person is responsive to this revelation? What happens when they see the testimony of God’s power and divinity and conclude, “There must be a God who created these things.” Is that sufficient to save them? The answer is **“No.”** **John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”**

When people respond properly to God’s self-revelation through creation, God does not promise them salvation but more

revelation. Jeremiah 29:13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

The promise of the Almighty to every person is that if they will **seek** Him with their whole heart, He will see to it that they **find** Him. The Lord spoke through Ezekiel in **Ezekiel 33:11** Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live... Peter testified in **2 Peter 3:9** The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

God does not cause people to be born in places where there is no knowledge of Himself and no gospel so that He can then throw them into hell. In the most obscure place, God provides a **witness** through the things He made in the creation that say to each man and each woman, "There is a God, and He is all powerful." If they then seek God with all their **heart**, God sends them more revelation, ultimately the **gospel**. If they continue to seek, they will come to faith in **Jesus Christ** and be saved.

We see that exact scenario with the Ethiopian eunuch. He was seeking God. Somehow, God had allowed him to have a copy of the scroll of **Isaiah**, which shows the lengths God was going to in order to save this man who was seeking Him. The eunuch came to the place where he was ready for the gospel. God sent an angel to Phillip and sent Phillip to the desert where the Ethiopian was reading Isaiah in his chariot. Then the Holy Spirit directed Phillip to the Ethiopian. Meanwhile, the Spirit had directed the Ethiopian's attention to Isaiah 53, which speaks of the **Suffering** Servant Messiah. His question about the passage opens the door to the sharing of the gospel, and the Ethiopian believes and is baptized.

Cornelius was a centurion in the Roman army. The Bible describes him as **devout** and as one who prayed often. He was a God seeker, and God sent Peter to him to explain the gospel, and Cornelius was saved. **Lydia** was a God seeking woman. The Lord sent Paul to share the gospel, and she was saved.

Paul used this very approach with the lost men of **Athens** who had no knowledge of the One True God at all. **Acts 17:23-28** ²³ for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: ²⁴ God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. ²⁵ Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. ²⁶ And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, ²⁷ so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸ for in Him we live and move and have our being...'

Paul begins by declaring God as the creator of the universe and the creator of all **life**. He then says that God created man to seek the Lord and offers the hope that they will find Him and points out that He is not far off.

Let us return to the question that was asked. How can a just, righteous, loving, merciful God pour out His wrath on people who have had no opportunity to know the truth about Him? How can He condemn people to hell for not trusting in Jesus when they have never heard the gospel or even the name of the Savior?

There is no such thing as a person who had **no** opportunity to know the truth about God. Every person has the **revelation** through creation of the divinity and power of the One True Creator God. If that person rightly **responds** to that revelation he or she is given, God will get the gospel to them. Therefore those who go to hell are only those who either refuse the witness of God given by **creation** or who refuse to trust the **Christ** of the gospel.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit says to the Romans and to us, **they are without excuse**. No one will ever be able to rightly accuse God of **injustice** or unfairness. He will never be guilty of capriciousness. It has been said, and rightly so, that the only ones who go to hell are those who **choose** to go there. God has lovingly and longingly revealed Himself as the Almighty Creator to everyone He created. Those who respond by seeking Him with all their heart, will find Him in the person of **Jesus Christ** who died on the cross to give them forgiveness of sin and eternal life.

so that **they are without excuse**,