

**Paul's Letter to the Romans  
Romans 1: 18-32 (NASV)**

John Baugh  
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**Unbelief and Its Consequences**

**<sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup>because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>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.**

**<sup>22</sup>Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. <sup>25</sup>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.**

**<sup>26</sup>For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, <sup>27</sup>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.**

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

In the first 17 verses of Chapter 1, Paul offers the introduction to his letter to the church in Rome. He ends that introduction with his great statement that sets the theme of Romans (The power of God to heal the human condition of men and give us liberty and freedom from the bondage of evil in our lives). Paul tells us this power from the righteousness of God comes to us through our faith:

**<sup>16</sup>For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup>For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." (Romans 1:16-17 NASV)**

Beginning with verse 18, Paul takes on a more somber tone as he begins to address the human condition before God. This evaluation will continue through Chapter 3, verse 20 and makes up one of the most thorough and logical evaluations of the human condition ever penned.

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Paul has already mentioned the Son of God, the key and heart of the gospel in his letter. Now he mentions the wrath of God. These are the first negative words of Paul's letter, but they are necessary because they tell us why we need the power of the gospel. The gospel's power is needed because men everywhere suffer the wrath of God in response to our actions.

So, what is the wrath of God? Most think that it is something that will come at some point (Judgment) in the future. Here, Paul writes that it is occurring right now. It is not lightening and sentencing to the lake of fire. Paul writes that it is being "revealed from heaven" at this time. The human condition causes all of us to be confronted with the wrath of God – the resistance of God to the evil of men. As the evil of men is everywhere, so is the wrath (the resistance of a just and righteous God) of God. It is everywhere.

Paul tells us that since the creation of man, the eternal power, divine nature and the attributes of God have been seen and understood by man. He writes that this understanding is within all of us. He reminds us that in our wickedness, ungodliness and unrighteousness, we suppress God's truth. We live in a world where God is all around us and we suppress him. Understanding that, we are without excuse.

Today's condition, where there is a never ending push to not even mention God screams out the truth in what Paul writes. Why do we suffer God's wrath? Just look at how we act. We walk God's earth telling each other that he does not exist (the truth we suppress). We seek to stop any mention of his Holy name. We ignore him. Why would he not express his wrath against us?

How has God made the truth plain to us? He has made it through his creation and his Holy Word.

Hebrews 11:6 says:

**"He that comes to God must believe that he is and that he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him."**

If men don't find God, it is because they do not seek him. If we seek him, he is there. God says that he is obvious and that we are without excuse.

Verse 21-23 - So, How do men suppress the truth about God?

**<sup>21</sup>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.**

**<sup>22</sup>Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup>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.**

One thing Paul says here is that Men and women suppress God's truth in two ways.

- They become Godless - they disrespect God.

- Considering human nature it follows then that they become wicked - they do hurtful things to others.

Three steps to suppressing God:

1 –Do not honor him as God or give thanks.

In other words, they ignore him. When they do this, their hearts become dark. Look at today, when it is not socially acceptable or judicially forbidden to mention God, give thanks to him, worship him, or read his Holy Word in public. It is just as if no one wants to admit there is a God or glorify and honor him or give him thanks.

Paul writes that when these things happen, our thinking becomes futile and that our foolish hearts become darkened. As Paul writes, it is as if a light goes out and our inner being (our hearts) become dark. We lose compassion and caring.

2 – They claim to be wise

They claim to (know everything) (be like God). We imitate God in our ways, but only to our understanding. When we do this, we become fools.

3 – They “exchange the glory of the incorruptible God for an image of corruptible man and of birds and four footed animals and crawling creatures”.

They make a god for themselves – note the progression from things that fly to things that walk to things that crawl.

**<sup>24</sup>Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.**

The first thing that characterizes wickedness is sexual immorality, what Paul calls lusts of the heart. It is the degrading of the body. When he mentions the first Consequence of wickedness, Paul uses the word "Therefore". The immorality men express is a direct consequence of our suppressing God's truth through wickedness.

God does not forget us, but Paul indicates here that God does "wash his hands" of us. Paul uses the term "gave them over", meaning that he allows us to fall to whatever level we go down to when we turn away from him into wickedness. Men who do this dishonor themselves. Perhaps more importantly they dishonor God first and the result of that is that they quickly dishonor themselves.

In verse 18, Paul mentions "The wrath of God". Paul will write about "the wrath of God" or "the wrath" more than once in his letter (1:18, 3:5, 4:5, 5:9, 12:19, 13:5). Here, God's wrath is expressed in that He allows us to live our lives of wickedness and then live with the consequences (the full effect) of those wicked lives. Whatever we do has consequences. When we turn from God, the consequences are never good. That is his wrath, allowing us to live with the consequences of what we become when we turn away from him.

The sobering thing about what Paul writes is that three times in four verses, Paul indicates that "God gave them over" (Verses 24, 26 and 28). What does this mean? It means that God releases us to do what we want in our own free will (since we insist on doing it our way, by our reasoning, failing to consider God's guidance) and allows us to suffer the outcome of what we do. Essentially we say "I know what I desire and I will do that". To put words in God's mouth, He then says "OK I will give this over to you, but there are consequences to whatever you decide to do and to whatever path you choose to follow." Paul equates this "God gave them over" to the wrath of God coming down on us.

This may be the most frightening thing about God. It is not the fact that God promises vengeance or wrath against us in the way of "Fire from Heaven" but that the nature of God's wrath is that he lets us go ahead and do things the way we insist on doing them. He allows us to make foolish decisions and follow paths that lead directly away from Him. Then we suffer the things we create in our foolishness.

**<sup>25</sup>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.**

What is the Truth of God?

- He is the creator. We are to have no other god but Him. When we make idols and worship other things, we turn away from Him. We exchange the truth of God for a lie.

- There is a way of life (righteousness) that God wants us to live. When we move away from righteousness, we exchange the truth of God for a lie.

**<sup>26</sup>For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, <sup>27</sup>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.**

Here, Paul makes a direct reference to homosexuality, which he writes is the result of the wickedness of man. This is where mankind sinks when they turn away from God. They exchange an unnatural function for what is natural.

In the time of Paul's letter, homosexuality was common in the Roman Empire. The great philosophers extolled it and practiced it, for the most part. Men like Socrates, and other great names of Greece, were homosexuals. Out of the first fifteen Roman emperors, fourteen of them were homosexuals, and some gave themselves blatantly and openly to this vice. This was common in the Roman world, as it is becoming common in our own day. It is not difficult to see that the restraints to homosexuality are being removed, and these things are thrusting themselves into public view. Verses 26 and 27 speak with straightforward truth to society of this time.

Paul says that this conduct leads to the "due penalty".

This is a loss of identity. It is an uncertainty as to what the role of a person in life should be. It is a growth in disease that simply was not a part of life in the past and to levels never experienced at any time in history.

**<sup>28</sup>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, <sup>29</sup>being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, <sup>30</sup>slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup>without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;**

As bad as sexual perversion seems, Paul goes on with the next objects of God's wrath. He gives men over to a depressing, horrible list of other sins. Paul's list points to society in a state of collapse where men have no regard at all. In fact they show a total disregard for their fellow men (and women) and an open exploitation of others. The more Godless mankind becomes, the more prevalent these things become in culture and society.

Paul's use of the term "depraved mind" means "unacceptable mind". In using the term, he indicates that such a condition is one that cannot be lived with. It will not fit into a society of morals, what we would call civilized. A mind that is depraved will destroy everything it contacts. It is a hostile mind and a cruel mind. Fiction is filled with stories of depraved minds. Sadly so are the daily news reports.

**<sup>32</sup>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.**

Paul says that those who have turned from God know what they have done, yet they still do these things and also give approval to anyone else in the same condition. They understand the harm they are causing and still practice the depraved acts. They see what they are creating and still attempt to spread their lifestyles and actions.

Paul was writing about the darkness of his day, and about the identical description of our time. Yet God remains concerned with us. He has allowed us to live, required us to live with how we live and yet remains concerned for us and ready to help us recover when we turn away from depravity back to him. What we must do is to wake up to how we see God and ourselves.

So, how does Paul end Chapter 1 of his letter? Pastor Ray Stedman put it this way:

“What is God's attitude toward all this? This is the amazing thing. This passage closes with these words in Verse 32: **“Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them.”** If we were to stop right here, we would say that God's attitude is one ending in wrath and hatred against these people. This is why so many people have the idea that God is just sitting up there as the judge, ready to cut off their heads if they get near him, because of the follies they have perpetrated. But you have read only half the letter in this case, because, as we read on, the amazing revelation in this letter is that these people who have insulted and offended and blasphemed God by their actions, who have refused his grace, and, in utter thanklessness, have wasted their lives that he is giving them -- these very people are the ones whom God loved and whom Christ came to die for.”

I read recently of a young man -- a modern prodigal son -- who had left home and then came back home after his father died. He was very kindly received by his mother. The day came for the reading of the father's will, and the family gathered, and the lawyer began to read the document. To the surprise of all who were present, the will told in detail all the wayward career of the prodigal son. As the boy sat and listened to the account of his evil, he arose in anger and left the house. Nobody heard from him for about three years. When, eventually, they found him, he was told that the will, after telling of his waywardness, had gone on to bequeath him \$15,000.

This illustrates the way that men and women read the Bible today. They read this opening chapter of Romans, they read of this terrible condemnation, and they know how true it is. They know the guilt in their own lives -- there isn't one of us who hasn't participated to some degree in some of these things which Romans mentions -- then they stop there. Or, in anger, they get up in a huff and slam their Bibles shut, and say, "I don't want to have anything to do with a God like that!"

But, if they read on, they discover that the whole purpose of this is simply to show them the love of God set against the dark background of human rebellion, for it is for this kind of people that Jesus Christ came. It was for them that he gave his life. It was for them that he poured himself out in death, that they might have restoration and harmony and be brought back into fellowship with God. For, of these very selfsame people that Paul describes here, it is written, **“while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,” {Rom 5:8b KJV}**. This is the proof of God's amazing love.”

Paul will continue his thoughts in Chapter 2 of Romans.