

“THE WRATH OF GOD IS REVEALED”

I. Introduction

- A. As you can see, this passage deals with the wrath of God, a subject that is extremely unpopular in our day, even among Christians.
1. What J.I. Packer wrote in his classic book *Knowing God* several decades ago is just as true today: “The modern habit throughout the Christian church is to play this subject down. Those who still believe in the wrath of God (not all do) say little about it; perhaps they do not think much about it. To an age which has unashamedly sold itself to the gods of greed, pride, sex, and self-will, the Church mumbles on about God’s kindness, but says virtually nothing about His judgment.” [134]
 2. While the wrath of God is not a pleasant subject, there is simply no getting around the fact that it is frequently discussed in the pages of Scripture.
 3. If we fail to reckon with this doctrine, neither our faith nor the church’s ministry will remain biblical.
- B. Notice that the passage that we have just read begins with the word “For.”
1. That little word is important.
 2. It tells us that the things that Paul says in this section serve as the logical basis of what he said in verses 16 and 17.
 3. In other words, Paul is showing us why we need the righteousness that God has revealed in the gospel.
 4. We need the gospel’s revelation of the righteousness of God because God’s wrath is revealed from heaven against our ungodliness and unrighteousness.

5. This is Paul's point all the way up through Romans 3:20.
 6. He is proving that the only righteousness that we can have before God is the righteousness that is revealed in the gospel and is received by faith alone.
- C. Here in the second half of chapter 1, Paul is speaking primarily of the Gentile or heathen world of his day.
1. The equivalent in our day would be secular society.
 2. That being said, the things Paul says in the next two chapters make it very clear that the main idea of this passage applies to every single one of us.
 3. This is a picture of the basic sinfulness of fallen man.
 4. As we study this passage today, we will see that it first tells us the cause of God's wrath and then it moves on to tell us three consequences of this wrath.

II. The Cause of God's Wrath (18-23)

- A. It is important to understand that the wrath of God is markedly different than human wrath.
1. When it comes to human wrath, even when our anger is justified, it is never free from the taint of our sin.
 2. God's wrath is no fit of anger.
 3. It is completely pure and holy.
 4. God's wrath is the response of his holiness to sin.
 5. In the words of John Murray, "Wrath is the holy revulsion of God's being against that which is the contradiction of his holiness."

6. Wrath is God's punitive justice, his judicial response to evil.
 7. God would not be just, he would not be loving, he would not be morally perfect if he did not react to evil with wrath.
 8. The Judge of all the earth will not fail to administer perfect justice.
 9. He will mete out what sin deserves.
- B. While a final day of reckoning will arrive at the end of history, this is not what Paul is talking about in this text.
1. He does not say that God's wrath will be revealed but that it is revealed.
 2. It is already being made known.
 3. God makes his wrath known in a variety of ways: through the temporal judgments that he sends upon this world, through the misery that sin produces, and through the ways in which the human conscience is afflicted with guilt.
 4. These things serve as harbingers of what is to come.
 5. As one commentator writes, "the present experience of God's wrath is merely a foretaste of what will come on the day of judgment." [Moo, 101]
- C. Our passage tells us that the cause of God's wrath is man's suppression of the truth.
1. God has not left himself without a witness.
 2. People cannot say that there is not enough evidence to establish God's existence.
 3. God has revealed his attributes and his nature to all people.

4. The natural world bears witness to God through its beauty, its grandeur, and its design.
 5. This general revelation is not sufficient to save people because it does not reveal Christ as the only way of salvation.
 6. However, general revelation is sufficient to establish that there is a God and to render us without excuse.
- D. All people know that there is a God.
1. Even the agnostic and the atheist know that there is a God.
 2. All people have a sense of what God is like.
 3. God has made his attributes plain to us.
 4. Yet in our rebellion we refuse to honor him.
 5. We do not give thanks to him for his many temporal blessings.
 6. Instead, we give ourselves over to vain imaginations and focus on satisfying self.
 7. We exchange the glory of God for the created things that we place above him.
 8. All of this testifies that the human heart, the governing center of our whole being, extending to our thoughts, our desires, and our will, has been thoroughly darkened.
 9. At the center of every human being there rests a thick darkness that can only be penetrated by the light of the gospel.

III. Consequence of Wrath: Enslaved to Impure Desires (24-25)

- A. We turn now to consider what this text tells us about the consequences of God's wrath.

1. Paul describes this by using the same phrase three times: "God gave them up".
 2. This can be described as judicial abandonment.
 3. God punishes sin by letting people become more and more immersed in their sin.
 4. He removes his hand of restraint, with the result that people are more and more given over to the dominion of sin.
- B. In verse 24 Paul says, "God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves."
1. God created the human body with honor.
 2. There is nothing inherently wrong with the human body or with our desires, including sexual desires.
 3. Marital love is a beautiful thing.
 4. It is a picture of Christ's relationship with his church.
 5. Yet we dishonor our bodies when we become slaves to our lusts.
- C. Paul is describing the first century heathen world here, but this is also a perfect description of our world.
1. We live in an age where the dishonoring of the body is celebrated, especially in the realm of sexuality.
 2. There is a curious paradox in our culture's attitude toward sex.
 3. On the one hand, sex is made into nothing because of the casual way in which it is handled.
 4. Human beings are degraded when they are treated as objects to be used for someone else's gratification.

5. On the other hand, sex is made into everything because any attempt to restrain or control sexual desire is deemed oppressive.
6. People take something beautiful and they simultaneously trash it and worship it.
7. Why has this happened?
8. It has happened because God has given people over to impurity and dishonor.
9. It is a matter of judicial abandonment.
10. People are paying a terrible price for our culture's flaunting of sex.
11. When an aspect of human nature that was meant to be clothed with dignity is stripped bare, misused, and made into a spectacle, the human collateral damage is devastating.
12. Make no mistake: we are seeing a revelation of the wrath of God.

IV. Consequence of Wrath: Homosexuality (26-27)

- A. In verses 26 and 27, Paul mentions a second consequence of God's wrath: homosexuality.
 1. Paul mentions female homosexual relationships first even though such relationships were less common in the ancient world than male homosexual relationships.
 2. It may be that Paul puts female homosexuality first in order to highlight the extent of society's degradation.
 3. In the words of Charles Hodge, females "are always the last to be affected in the decay of morals, and their corruption is therefore proof that all virtue is lost." [42]
- B. Pro-homosexual interpreters have tried to argue that these verses only condemn exploitative relationships with adolescents, slaves, and temple

prostitutes.

1. That interpretation simply cannot withstand scrutiny.
 2. For one thing, there is no record of exploitative homosexual relationships among women in the ancient world, yet Paul talks about both male and female homosexuality in this passage.
 3. Also, Paul explicitly says that the men “were consumed with passion for one another”, a statement that clearly describes consensual activity.
 4. Lastly, the reason that Paul gives for why homosexuality is wrong is because it is “contrary to nature.”
 5. Homosexual sex is sinful because it goes against God’s design.
 6. It is a violation of the created order that God has established.
 7. As such, it is self-dishonoring for those who engage in it.
 8. As New Testament scholar Robert Gagnon explains, “homosexual intercourse... treats the sex of the participants as only half intact in relation to the sex that they already are, as though two half-males make a whole male or two half-females make a whole female. Contrast the salutary logic of a heterosexual union, where the two halves of the sexual spectrum unite to form a single sexual whole.” [<http://spectator.org/articles/63774/how-supreme-court-abolished-article-v-constitution>]
 9. Even though our nation’s highest court has recently ruled that same-sex marriage is a constitutional right, that ruling does not make unnatural acts natural.
- C. We are witnessing a society-wide giving over in this area.
1. We are seeing people receive in themselves the due penalty for their error.

2. The increasing acceptance of homosexuality in our culture is a revelation of the wrath of God upon human unrighteousness.
3. Of course, this does not mean that a homosexual cannot be saved from God's final wrath.
4. They most assuredly can.
5. It is certainly true that no one who impenitently engages in homosexual acts (or in any kind of sexual immorality) will be delivered on the last day.
6. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6 that "neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." (vv. 9-10)
7. Yet in the very next breath Paul says this: "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (v. 11)
8. These verses remind us that as debased as a human being can become, God's power is sufficient to save anyone.

V. Consequence of Wrath: A Debased Mind (28-32)

- A. This brings us to the third consequence of divine wrath that Paul mentions in this passage: a debased mind.
 1. This giving over happens because people do not see fit to use their minds to acknowledge God.
 2. They see religion seen as irrelevant or oppressive.
 3. They are happy to live without God.
 4. When people abandon God in this way, God abandons them by giving them over to a debased mind, a mind that does not function

properly, a mind that approves the wrong things and rejects the right things, a mind that is bent on doing what ought not to be done.

- B. Paul lists a whole host of sins in this final paragraph of the chapter.
1. We find similar vice lists elsewhere in the New Testament and even in other ancient literature.
 2. The focus here is upon various social evils, calling our attention to the relational devastation that is caused by our sinfulness.
 3. The description set forth in these verses extends beyond the first century Greco-Roman world to cover all places and all eras.
 4. In the words of Charles Hodge, "Wherever men have existed, there have they shown themselves to be sinners, ungodly and unrighteous, and therefore justly exposed to the wrath of God." [43]
- C. The debasement of our minds is seen in the fact that we commit the sins that are listed here even though we know that they are wrong.
1. God has written his law upon the human conscience.
 2. We know when we are doing things that ought not to be done, but we do them anyway.
 3. This explains why homosexuals in our culture are pressing not only for the freedom to commit acts of indecency but also for the public approval of those acts.
 4. They are trying to suppress what their conscience knows to be true.
- D. In the final verse of this chapter, Paul says that the height of the mind's debasement is when people know that certain things are wrong and approve of those who practice them.

1. The thing that makes this so wicked is that it promotes vice.
2. It makes sin acceptable to the public opinion.
3. To approve of a practice is to remove the social stigmas that may be attached to it.
4. When such stigmas are removed, more people will engage in the behavior.
5. While we should always extend the love of Christ to all people, it is not loving to tell people that God approves of something that incites his wrath.
6. To approve of that which is evil is to align oneself with the spirit that is at work in the sons of disobedience.

VI. Conclusion

- A. When we understand that our sin incites God's wrath, we see our need for the righteousness that comes from God.
 1. We all deserve to have the wrath of God fall upon us.
 2. We need to understand how dreadful that would be.
 3. The Bible tells us that the final display of God's wrath on the last day will be so terrible that unbelievers will wish that the mountains would fall on them and crush them instead.
 4. But there will be nowhere to hide on that day.
 5. Every single person who has ever lived will stand before Christ and hear him say one of two things.
 6. You will either hear him say, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

7. Or you will hear him say, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."
- B. If we fail to reckon with God's wrath, we will not see our need for Christ.
1. God's punitive justice is the foundation of our need for a vicarious atonement, a substitute who bears God's wrath in our place.
 2. It is only through the blood of Christ that we can be saved from the wrath of God.
 3. Jesus is the propitiation for our sins, the sacrifice that removes God's wrath by absorbing it.
 4. We are utterly powerless to save ourselves.
 5. We need to cast ourselves upon Christ as he is offered to us in the gospel.
 6. The gospel alone is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.