

Romans 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: **The righteous will live by faith.**

Intro: Before Paul explains **how the** Gospel is God's power for salvation and God's power for righteous living, he must help two groups of people appreciate this glorious gospel.

**Chapter 1 is an explanation of why the human race and Gentiles in particular need his Gospel**—the righteousness of God that is now revealed. He has to show the non-Jews just how far they've fallen in hopes to bring them to repentance and faith.

**Chapter 2 he has to turn his attention to the Jews to say, "and do you think you'll be justified before God because you've got Abraham as your father, or because you preach a strict moral standard to others? Nope. You, with the Torah law, stand equally unjustified before God because all have sinned.**

**But in order for us to appreciate and be led to the righteous revealed in the Gospel**—we must see the depths of our unrighteousness before a holy God. In addition to revealing his righteousness in His Gospel, he also reveals his wrath against unrighteousness.

**"For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" (Rom 1:18).** The reason why the gospel is the power of God unto salvation is because it proposes to solve a dilemma into which we have gotten ourselves and out of which we cannot possibly hope to save ourselves. The gospel reveals God's righteousness for all who believe, and God's wrath is revealed against all unrighteousness to bring us back into relationship with God.

## What is the wrath of God?

The word wrath is the term *orgé* and designates a strong indignation toward wrongdoing with a focus on retribution, or retributive justice.<sup>1</sup> There is the judicial verdict followed by an expression of strong outrage for the crime committed.

**Analogy:** Sometimes you'll see a judge read the verdict and hand down their sentence in a very matter of fact way—followed by a final personal statement of revulsion over the heinous nature of the crime.

There are essentially three forms of wrath that we encounter:

**(1) Eschatological Wrath**—a final, irreversible judgment on an unbelieving sinner who stands guilty in sin, refused to receive God's pardon for sin through the death of Jesus, and now receives a final and unalterable sentence of damnation in hell.

**(2) Natural Wrath**—a standing judgment on creation, which has been subjected to futility by God, who will set creation free from its bondage to decay into the glorious freedom as new creation (Rom 8:20).

**(3) Punitive/Corrective Wrath**—the subject of Paul's discussion today. This wrath is already being revealed against all godlessness and unrighteousness in the hopes that those delivered over to it will repent and possibly even be redeemed.

**How do we know it's this third type of wrath?** Because 3 times Paul uses the judicial term *paradidomi* meaning "to deliver to a bailiff for sentencing." Three times Paul will tell us that God delivered people over to their passions. This is a last resort in the hopes that the consequences will teach the individual (or the culture) the folly of having followed that path.

**Example:** Paul refers to a situation the Corinthians were tolerating: a young man committing adultery with his stepmother and openly claiming to be a believer in good standing in the local church there. Paul says in 1 Cor 5:1-5, "I have given him up (*paradidomi*) to Satan for the destruction of his flesh in order that his spirit might be saved on the Day of the Lord's [wrath]." The purpose of God's delivering over wrath was to save this young man from eschatological wrath.

So the wrath Paul is talking about here in Rom 1:18ff. is God's wrath to deliver us over to the sinful devices that we demand in order to teach us just how destructive a path we've chosen. And in the hopes that we might possibly be delivered from the final wrath of God being stored up for us on the Day of God's judgment.

So long as God's wrath is being revealed against all godlessness and unrighteousness—there's hope that a person or a culture can turn to the righteousness revealed in God's gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 720.

## Why is God's wrath necessary?

1. **God has revealed his nature to us and we have rejected that revelation (1:19-20).** “For God’s wrath is **revealed** from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness **suppress** the truth, <sup>19</sup>since **what can be known** about God is **evident** among them, because God has **shown** it to them. <sup>20</sup>For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been **clearly seen** since the creation of the world, being **understood** through what he has made. As a result, people are **without excuse.**”

*God has revealed himself in the created order such that his invisible, immaterial, and eternal attributes* can be clearly seen in the visible, material, and temporal universe. The revelation supplied is sufficient and obvious, such that to deny it constitutes actively suppressing it. *When a normally functioning mind looks at the world in all of its clockwork perfection and mind-boggling wonder—the properly functioning mind doesn’t just ask process questions (how does it work)—but philosophical questions (why does it work—where did it come from—who is the designing mind behind all this exquisite creation?).*

*The creation cries out for an explanation of its existence—that explanation is either it exists necessarily or contingently.* But there doesn’t seem to be any obvious reason to think that the world exists necessarily—like all things the universe appears to be contingent—it’s existence and emergence is dependent on something external to it. *The conclusion that the universe has a planning, intentional and creating intellect behind it is the most natural deduction you will ever make about anything.*

Now Paul says, God has made it clear, plain to see to them. Men “knew God” but denied him anyway. So what’s the problem here? If the evidence is plain to see and perspicuous—but people can’t see it and claim not to know it then what we have is not an evidence problem but a sight problem. Spiritual darkness and blindness to see the truth.

The problem is that the unbeliever’s mind is in a state of spiritual darkness.

**Analogy:** Now, you’ve been a heavy smoker your whole life and didn’t realize that in addition to causing lung cancer, heart disease, stroke, and a host of other health problems—that smoking decreases the flow of oxygen and nutrients to your eyes, weakening your retinal tissue causing macular degeneration and severe cataracts. The doctor has told you “stop smoking right now and your eyesight will likely improve.” But you refuse, so you develop severe tunnel vision, can barely see 25 feet in front of you—yet refuse to quit the habit. If I took you out to a mountain ridge to show you the most stunning sunrise you wouldn’t be able to see it. You may say “It’s not there. There’s nothing to see because I can’t see it.”

**The problem here is not that the evidence isn't there**—we don't lack data for the eyes to process—you lack sight.

You see if you have sin problem then you have a spiritual sight problem.

The conclusion that the universe has a planning, intentional and creating intellect behind it is the most natural deduction you will ever make about anything.

The result is that no one can use the excuse “I couldn't see the evidence for God's existence so I should be exempt from judgment.”

Paul wants to say God's revelation in nature is sufficient for the general observation that God exists, is glorious and responsible for everything that makes our lives possible and worth living.

2. **God has revealed his law having written it on our hearts (2:14-16).** Paul doesn't only tell us about God's revelation in the created order, but his revelation in the human conscience. The function of our conscience is to accuse and restrain us from unchecked wrongdoing leading to utter oblivion. "So, when Gentiles, who do not by nature have the law, do what the law demands, they are a law to themselves even though they do not have the law. <sup>15</sup> They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts. Their consciences confirm this. Their competing thoughts either accuse or even excuse them <sup>16</sup> on the day when God judges what people have kept secret, according to my gospel through Christ Jesus."

There are two things being revealed, the nature of God as eternal, immortal, invisible, and divine—and the existence of a moral law which constitutes our obligations towards God and other people.

- *God is holy and jealously guards the sanctity of his creation.* **Sin defiles** that which is pure, holy, and good. God is the **High Priest of his cosmic temple**—and sin brings defilement into his holy, cosmic temple. When God pronounces that the world is "good" he means, "that's the way the world is supposed to be." Purity means "whole, righteous, truly good—free from the quality of contamination." **And sin desecrates the sacred, it vandalizes the hallowed ground of God's garden sanctuary.**
- *God is the Sovereign-King over his realm.* **Sin is living in defiance** of his unqualified authority over this kingdom. God is the **Benevolent and absolute ruler over his realm.** As the world's Sovereign King, God aims to bring a world out of alignment back into alignment, but in order to do so he must put down all the seditious and rebellious activity within his kingdom.
- *God is the Supreme Judge of his people.* **Sin delinquency to the moral law** of God and must be accounted for before the bar of his divine justice. God is the **Just Judge who holds court.** As we have said, the term *orge* (wrath) is a judicial term. The Psalms frequently refer to God as the judge of the whole earth. Isaiah repeatedly warns all the peoples and nations that they will stand before the bench of God's judgment. Paul insists that everyone who presumes to judge others will not escape God's judgment (Rom 2:3, 16) for it is God who judges the world (Rom 3:6). So God is just to punish sin because sin not only defiles his sacred space, but it defies his moral law.
- *God is our gracious and loving Heavenly Father.* **Sin is dishonor—it is an open-handed slap to the face of his fatherly honor.** As our **gracious and honored Father in Heaven**, God sees the devastation, the brutality and cruelty that is caused by our sins. God's love for those made in his image moves him to redeem us and bring us back into harmony with Him. God's honor has been slapped and offended—yet he loves the rebels who have perpetrated this offense.

## How have we rejected God's self-revelation in creation and conscience?

3. **We've denied God's existence through idolatry or atheism (Rom 1:21-23, 25, 28a).** Understand that idolatry is essentially atheism which can take on two forms: (1) Assigning God's attributes (category specific and unique attributes) to things in the created order. (2) Or affirming naturalism, the belief that the only things that exist are those things in the natural, created order. "For though **they knew God**, they did not **glorify** him as God or show **gratitude**. Instead, their **thinking** became worthless, and their **senseless hearts** were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the **glory** of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles...They exchanged the **truth** of God for a lie, **and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator**, who is praised forever. Amen...And because they did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God..."

Paul says "God is knowable" and we are obligated as his created image-bearers to offer him the glory for creation, and the gratitude for all that he's provided.

***Failing to be gratified in his glory, and withholding gratitude for his provision is equivalent to false worship.***

***If a person or a culture's worldview begins by denying the premise/truth that God exists and then there is no objective grounding for the nature of a human being, and no objective source of moral truth who issues moral demands or obligations to the human being.***

The second premise, however, is just as important...The second way we've rejected God's revelation is...

4. **We've denied God's authority to determine our purpose and prescribe us moral laws (1:21a-23).** Denying God's existence leads to the de-goding of God. The second denial leads to the dehumanization of God's imagers. To deny that God alone has the right by design and divine decree to determine what the nature of a human being is, the function of that being, and relationships that lead to human flourishing.

The denial of these two foundational truths leads to all kinds of sinful outcomes.

- Spurning God's glory: A life that exchanges God's glory for lesser glories (1:21b, 23).
- Refusing to offer thanksgiving: A life that refuses to offer thanksgiving to God for his provision and grace.
- Resulting in futile and worthless reasoning (1:21c-23).

Now it becomes a life that lives outside of the holiness of God, the just judgments of God, the rule of his sovereign grace, and the love of a heavenly Father who has provided for our atonement on the cross.

And so God's "wrath" is to deliver us up to the our captors—to let each of us turn to our own way.

**What is the result of rejecting God’s revelation and denying his authority over creation?** God delivers us over to the desires of our hearts—he renders the verdict and delivers us to our chosen jailers (Rom 1:24-28).

**And the most obvious example that he gives here is the emergence and demand for perverse sexual relationships.**

### **5. God has delivered us over to perverse sexuality and corrupt minds (1:24, 26-28).**

- Heterosexual Perversion (1:24). “Therefore God delivered them over in the desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves.”
- God designed human beings to function as male and female, then blessed that relationship with fruitfulness. The world is blessed by our kind.
  - Natural sexual temptation vs. inflamed passions
- Homosexual Perversion (1:26-27). “For this reason God delivered them over to disgraceful passions. Their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.<sup>27</sup> The men in the same way also left natural relations with women and were inflamed in their lust for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their error.”

A sure sign that a culture is running from God, rejecting the knowledge of Him and his authority over human relationships is the rampant practice and approval of homosexual relationships in all their various permutations.

- Unnatural sexual temptation vs. inflamed lust.

So what does a person do if they’re struggling with temptation?

1 Corinthians 10:13 “No temptation has come upon you except what is common to humanity. But God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to bear it.”

- Confess that your desire is sinful.
- Acknowledge that God exists and alone has the right to determine your purpose and prescribe your moral duties.
- Seek the Kingdom and His righteousness through prayer, regular engagement in body life, and saturating your mind in God’s word.
- Refuse to allow your mind to become corrupted by the ignorant, and perverse culture.
- And after everything you have done everything to stand—STAND! Stand unmovable in God’s word. Stand unshakeable planted in his holy community of saints. Stand unswerving come what may. Be it temptation, or societal pressure, or condemnation—you stand on the Rock, the God of your salvation who fills you to all fullness in the power of the Holy Spirit.