

### (iii) *Rejecting & Perverting the Truth, 1:21-23*

- Another reason for God's wrath is that men have the knowledge of God, but they do not respond properly to it – they refused to glorify God and do not give thanks to Him. God's wrath is manifested in 2 ways:
    - First, there is moral and spiritual darkness (1:21-22). When men reject God, (i) it affects their minds: the reasoning, the thoughts of the heathens are vain or futile or foolish; (ii) it darkens their foolish hearts - they "*became fools.*" "Fools" do not refer to someone with mental deficiency, but to spiritual and moral deficiency. Only fools reject God (Ps 14:1; Eph 4:18).
    - Second, rejecting the truth of God leads to idolatry (1:23). Instead of worshipping the Creator, the living and true God, who created them, the Gentiles worship idols, the creation of their hands (Isa 44:9-20; Ps 106:19-21). They substitute the glory of the one true God with manmade idols.
- God is just in pouring out His wrath on the human race because we have sinfully rejected His revelation of Himself.
- General revelation will not save men. But men do have a sufficient knowledge of God's existence and nature in the things He has made to render them responsible. Ignorance cannot be pleaded. God has revealed enough of Himself to the Gentiles for them to be blameworthy when they sin & reject His leading. Anyone who lives up to the light he has, God will give him more light. God will see to it that he receives the gospel in some form. Eg. Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius, Abraham (Acts 8:31,35; 10:2; Josh 24:2).

### 3. The Condemnation of the Gentile / Heathen (1:24-32)

- When men repeatedly reject God, at that point in time, God ceases to restrain them. He gives them up to all kinds of sin – He "*gave them up/over*" (3X – 1:24,26,28). God let them go their own way so that they might experience the full destructive consequences of their own sins (Ps 81:12). The ultimate result of sin is always pain and suffering, heartache and misery, agony, and death. In His wrath, God allows man to go on destroying themselves with their sins. God has designed His moral laws so that if you break them individually or if a society casts them off collectively, those laws turn around and break you (Jas 1:15). There are 3 specific areas to which God "*gave them up/over*":

#### (i) *God gave them up to Immorality, 1:24-25*

- One aspect of God's wrath is to give sinners over to their uncleanness or sexual immorality, so that they experience the inevitable, horrible consequences of sin – they become slaves to sensual physical desires. God has designed sex as a good gift, but He clearly commands that it be restricted to monogamous, heterosexual marriages. Outside of that context, if we engage in sexual behavior, we defile ourselves with impurity. When God gives a sinner over to this kind of sin, it is dishonouring to the body in the way God created us.

### The Condemnation of the Gentile / Heathen (1:18-32)

- 1:18-32 begins the 1<sup>st</sup> major section in Romans: the wrath of God against sinners. Paul addresses 3 groups of people: the Gentiles or heathens (1:18-32); the moralists or "upright" people (2:1-16); and the Jews (2:17-3:6). He tells all of them that they have sinned (3:9-20); that everyone is condemned before God and deserving of His wrath.

#### 1. The Wrath of God (1:18a)

- V18 begins with a terrifying indictment of human sin: "FOR" without the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are under the wrath of God and are condemned to hell! Man's wrath is never holy and rarely justified (Eph 4:26; Col 3:6-8). But the wrath of God is completely righteous in character. God's wrath is the natural and necessary expression of God's holiness against sin and wickedness. It is His personal anger against sin (Hab 1:13a). God's wrath is a part of His holy nature; He cannot love what is good without hating what is evil.
  - Sin is manifested in 2 ways:
    - "*Ungodliness*" - this refers to man's offenses against God. This word properly means "impiety" toward God.
    - "*Unrighteousness of/toward men*" – this refers to man's offenses or wrongs done against his fellow men.
- Ungodliness or sin against God leads to unrighteousness or sin against man.
- God is no idle spectator of world's events; He is not passive in the face of sin. The gravity of sin will be met by the strength of the divine reaction it provokes. God's wrath is sure and real against sin.
    - God's wrath was revealed in the past – the universal flood, the destruction of the Tower of Babel, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, etc.
    - There will be a future day of wrath at the final judgment (2:5). When Jesus comes again, He is going to be coming as a Judge (cf Rev 19:11-15).
  - In 1:18, Paul uses the present tense when he writes, "*For the wrath of God is revealed....*" (or, is "being revealed"). The wrath of God is constantly being revealed or manifested in the world around us.
    - We see God's wrath in all the effects of the fall of man, both on creation and on human misery and suffering (cf 8:22). We see floods, fires, earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, famines, and diseases, which cause untold suffering and death. This is the wrath of God unleashed through natural disasters.
    - We see God's wrath of God on display when He "*gave them up*" to their sins and its consequences (1:24,26,28). This is the wrath of God that is experienced in this life because men reap what they sow.
  - God's character is consistent throughout eternity. The God of the OT is the same God of the NT. He is a God of grace and wrath.
    - The God of the OT is the same gracious God as the God of the NT. Examples: (i) God demonstrated His grace when He covered the shame of

their nakedness by clothing Adam and Eve with animal skins. He also promised to send a seed of the woman to undo the curse and destroy the serpent, and Christ is the fulfilment of this promise; (ii) Jonah was called by God to preach to the Ninevites, a heathen people. The whole city of Nineveh repented, and God spared them from impending destruction.

- The God of the NT is the same wrathful and just God as the God of the OT. Jesus spoke of judgment & hell over ten times more than He spoke about love. The Book of Revelation shows the many forms of wrath that will be poured out on sinners both before and after Jesus returns. There are many references in Scripture that speak of God's holy justice and wrath – egs. Matt 3:7; John 3:16; John 3:36; Eph 5:6; 2 Thess 1:8-9, etc.

There is only one God. He is an immutable God and cannot change.

- The wrath of God is an essential aspect of God's Person; and it is necessary to the biblical understanding of who God is. If God did not have wrath, then He would not be God. The greatest example of God pouring out His wrath was when He put His own Son on the cross to bear and die for our sins. Jesus' death shows that God cannot just brush our sin aside. His righteous judgment must be satisfied. The wrath of God is a fearsome and terrifying thing. Only those who have been covered by the blood of Christ, shed for us on the cross, can be assured that God's wrath will never fall on them (5:9).

## 2. The Guilt of the Gentile or Heathen (1:18b-23)

- Paul turns to the sins of the Gentiles or heathens - those who do not acknowledge the God of the Bible - and shows that they are condemned before God.

### *(i) Suppressing the Truth, 1:18*

- God's wrath is poured out on men who "*hold the truth* (suppress) *in unrighteousness.*" These Gentiles are not ignorant of the truth; they have the truth, but they suppress it. They refuse God as He is.
- Man is an intellectual being made after God's image with a moral capacity to know and worship God (Job 32:8). The existence of God is written in human conscience even though they do not know Him personally (2:15; Acts 14:15-17; 17:23). Man is born with the universal belief in a Supreme Being; he intuitively knows about God (Eccl 3:11). There is more than abundant evidence of an all-powerful Creator but men suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

### *(ii) Denying the Truth, 1:19-20*

- God's wrath also falls upon man because he denies the truth about God. There are 2 ways that God reveals Himself to man:
  - The first way is through general or natural revelation, which is the self-disclosure of God in a general, non-saving way. General revelation reveals the existence of God and makes known His attributes to all men - the light

of nature, the works of creation and providence manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God.

- The second way is through special or saving revelation, which is found in God's written Word (vv2,17).

No one can be saved merely by general revelation. We can only come to a saving knowledge of Christ through the special revelation found in the Bible (10:17).

- When Paul writes, "*Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.....*," he is referring to the truth about God's existence and attributes. Four things characterize this revelation:
  - This truth about God is evident or clearly seen. The fact of God's existence is not hidden from human race.
  - God has revealed Himself to man from the beginning of the world.
  - We can draw conclusions about the Creator from His creation – His invisible attributes are clearly seen.
  - It is a limited revelation in that it does not reveal everything about God but some things (ie. His power and godhead or divine nature).
- The expression – "*that which may be known of God*" - implies that there are some things about God which may be known. Such are His existence, and many of His attributes - His power, wisdom, and justice, etc. This knowledge is attainable by observing the handiwork of God in creation or nature: "*By the things that are made.*" The "teleological argument" or the "argument from design" shows that God has revealed Himself to man in the beauty or glory of creation. When we look at nature and creation - its order, beauty, unity, design, and complexity – it points to God as the Designer or Divine Maker.
- God has revealed Himself in creation; this knowledge is worldwide and undeniable.
  - The beauty & glory of the heavens speak loudly saying, "God exists" (Ps 19:1-4). The truths about God are there for all to see. No matter where a person is in the world, God is speaking to him. It is the very nature of God to be revealing Himself to mankind.
  - The vastness of the universe gives testimony to God as the Creator (Ps 8:3-4; Rev 4:11). The details and immensity of nature show thoughtfulness and creativity. It is difficult to imagine how such intricacies could have come to be without God.
- We can know "*the invisible things of Him*" or God's invisible attributes from creation. God shows us something of His eternal power and godhead (or, divine nature) through creation, by the things that are made. Creation testifies that God is awesome. He is powerful. He is orderly. He is perfect. Natural or general revelation makes man responsible to respond to his Creator in worship and submission. Creation leaves us without excuse! Every person on earth, whether they have heard the gospel or not, is directly accountable to God, being without excuse. They know that there is a God, whether they admit it or not.

- V25 explains the reason that God gives people over in their lusts to impurity by basically repeating the truth of 1:23. Sinful men exchange this truth of God for “the lie,” which refers to the lie of idolatry. Since men choose to give up God & worship the creature, God allows them to go their way & suffer the consequences. It is not so much that God will punish men because of their idolatry and immorality, but that idolatry and immorality is itself punishment for rejecting divine revelation. God gives men to the control of sinful things that they prefer to God (Gal 6:7-8).

(ii) *God gave them up to Unnatural Practices, 1:26-27*

- *For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections...* - or shameful or dishonourable desires and passions. Paul uses homosexuality – both in the female and the male expressions – as an example of God giving mankind over to their vile affections. In v26 the reference is evidently to lesbianism; in v27, homosexuality. These behaviours represent so plainly what is contrary to nature – “*which is against nature*” – and “*unseemly*” or shameful. Just as idolatry is a violation and perversion of what God intended, so too homosexuality is a violation of what God intended when He created male and female.
- Paul speaks of a penalty for homosexual conduct; homosexuality has within itself a penalty (v27). Men committing shameful acts with other men received in themselves the due penalty for their sin. Homosexuality is evidence of the wrath of God on sin! Men reject God and His purposes for them, and God gives man over to practice the unnatural. The deeper we get into sin, the deeper we get into foolishness and confusion.
- God calls homosexual conduct as “*vile affections.*” The biblical ordinance of one woman and one man in marital fidelity is the foundation for marriage and the family (Gen 2:24). To branch off from this or to distort this in any way wrecks those involved.
  - God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for their widespread practice of homosexuality (Gen 19).
  - Israel recognized the wickedness of the Gibeonites’ homosexual practice. They consequently destroyed the Gibeonites (Judges 19-21).
  - God calls homosexuality “an abomination” and “a detestable act” (Lev 18:22; 20:13).
  - God hates sexual perversions (1 Cor 6:9-10).
  - Paul condemns homosexuality and calls it contrary to sound doctrine (1 Tim 1:8-11).

God’s Word is not tolerant of homosexuality or ambiguous about it; it is clearly sin.

- Homosexuality is a sin; but like any other sin, it can be forgiven. The sinner can be cleansed by the blood of Christ. There is victory in Christ over such vile practices (1 Cor 6:11). Homosexuals can be delivered by Christ.

(iii) *God gave them over to a Reprobate (Depraved) Mind, 1:28-31*

- As final judgment, God gives man over to a reprobate or debased mind, so that things that are disgraceful and sickening are committed. By their repeated rejection of God, they are descending deeper and deeper into an ocean of sin. In vv29-31, Paul lists the kinds of sin that result when God gives people over to their reprobate minds - a list of 23 loathsome sins practiced by people who have chosen to disregard God. This list of sins is only symptoms of a greater problem – the sin that is in the heart of human beings or the utter depth of human depravity.
- It is bad enough to be guilty of these things, but even worse to applaud and encourage others who do them (v32). Paul adds that they are “doubly accountable” by the fact that they not only do such things but applaud others who do it. When a society flaunts and gives hearty approval to such sins, even applauding them as right, it shows that God has already given that society over to impurity, to degrading passions, and to a depraved mind.
- Romans begins the explanation of the gospel at the heart of human depravity. Paul draws attention to what a society that rejects God and is given over to the lusts of their flesh, degrading passions and depraved minds looks like. The beauty of the message of salvation is that despite our moral inability, God calls us out of darkness through the finished work of Jesus. In the Gospel, in the power of Jesus Christ, God will not deliver us to our sin, He will deliver us from our sin. Instead of us facing the wrath of God, Jesus bore the wrath of God for us on the cross so that we may be right before or reconciled to God.

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