

Romans 1:18-32  
Judgment – Part 1

Introduction

1. Last week Paul shared his desire to visit his readers in Rome so that he could preach the Gospel among them
2. He finished by asserting his confidence in the Gospel as the power of God for salvation, and declaring that in the Gospel the righteousness of God is revealed and that it can only be manifest “from faith to faith”
3. If you remember, this means that salvation begins with initial faith (belief) and continues with a life of faith (“from faith to faith”)
4. Our passage today begins with a conjunction...“for”... and serves to provide the answer to why salvation and righteousness are only available through faith
5. The reason faith is required is because without it, all of mankind faces God’s wrath

A. God’s wrath is real and a result of our sin (1:18)

1. The first thing we learn today is that the wrath of God is a reality (1:18): **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven...”**
  - a. Most of the world’s population lives in **willful** ignorance on this fact
  - b. In fact, many so-called Christians today believe in two different God’s—the God of wrath who only existed in the OT, and the God of grace and mercy who now exists in the NT
  - c. But, Paul speaks of God’s wrath in the present tense when writing to the believers and churches in Rome—in other words, God’s wrath is not a long gone, outdated concept from the OT
  - d. What is God’s wrath?
    - 1) Hebrew *orge*: anger, fury
    - 2) Webster’s: “retributory punishment for an offense or a crime”
    - 3) That’s the meaning here because Paul writes that God’s wrath is revealed **“from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men”**
  - e. What does it mean for God’s wrath to **“be revealed”**?
    - 1) In a literal sense, the Greek term here means to uncover something or bring it out of hiding
    - 2) But, in the NT it generally means **to make something fully known**
    - 3) Here it implies the manifestation or carrying out of God’s wrath in judgment
    - 4) Biblically, wrath must be understood not merely as a state or emotion, but rather an act
    - 5) With God, it always involves judgment against sin (Romans 2:5)
2. There is something else we need to understand about God’s wrath, and that is that it’s always provoked:
  - a. To provoke someone means to deliberately irritate, annoy or anger someone
  - b. Notice that God’s wrath is a response to **“ungodliness and unrighteousness”**:
    - 1) **“ungodliness”**: means just that—to live and behave in a way that is unlike God, a way that is contrary to His character and actions

- 2) **“unrighteousness”**: this is similar but reflects a disregard for what is right, favoring what is wrong; sometimes it’s translated as injustice
3. The last thing I will point out in this verse is that this applies to all of mankind, every one of us:
  - a. Notice that the text doesn’t say that God’s wrath is revealed against all ungodly and unrighteous men, but rather all ungodliness and unrighteousness *of men*
  - b. It’s not only some people that face God’s wrath, or only the really bad people; it’s all people
  - c. Paul stresses this throughout the first few chapters of Romans (3:10-18)

B. God’s wrath is justified (18c-23)
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1. God’s wrath is justified because mankind has chosen to suppress the truth about God: **“who suppress the truth in unrighteousness”**:
  - a. To suppress something means to cover it up or hold it back and that’s what mankind naturally does when confronted with the truth of God
  - b. Paul says here that mankind suppresses this truth **“in unrighteousness”**, or better **“by means of [their] unrighteousness”**
2. So what truth is Paul talking about here?
  - a. Paul mentions three specific things in vs 20 **“...His invisible attributes, His eternal power and [his] divine nature”** (20)
    - 1) These things **“have been clearly seen”**—which means that they are evident, easy to see
    - 2) These things have always been visible **“since the creation of the world”**
    - 3) And they are **“understood through what has been made”** (e.g. general revelation)
    - 4) Read Psalm 19:1-6
  - b. Paul also says that these truths about God are **“evident within”** mankind (19):
    - 1) Notice that Paul says **“evident within”** and not just **“evident to them”**
    - 2) This is because **“God made it evident to them”**
    - 3) Because of this, **“they are without excuse”** (20)
    - 4) And they are without excuse because **“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. Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 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. ”**

C. God’s wrath is evident (24-32)
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1. In the next 11 verses, Paul goes on to explain the punitive ways in which God’s wrath has been poured out against man’s sin:
  - a. Many see three ways because the phrase “God gave them over” occurs three times (24, 26 & 28)
  - b. However, vs. 26 & 27 seem to be a further description of verses 24-25, rather than another example
    - 1) The phrase **“for this reason”** (Greek *dia* with an accusative) almost universally points back to what’s just been described than forward to something about to be described

- 2) The phrases “lusts of their hearts to impurity”, “bodies would be dishonored”, “degrading passions” and men and women exchanging their natural sexual functions are all synonyms for sexual immorality
2. The first way God’s wrath has been poured out is that He gave them over to their immorality (24-27): **“Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.”**
- a. The phrases make it clear that the **“lusts of their hearts”** here are sexually immoral
- 1) **“impurity”**: the word translated impurity implies sexual immorality
  - 2) **“so that their bodies would be dishonored among them”**—e.g. they treated their bodies in a shameful or disrespectful way
- \*\*The NASB “so that” is a bit misleading because this phrase is more likely exegetically (explanatory) rather than an infinitive of purpose or result—in other words, God gave them over to their impure motives not so that they would dishonor their bodies, but rather this phrase explains that their lusts involved dishonoring their bodies. The ESV captures this: **“Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.”**
- b. While some see the phrase **“gave them over”** as simply God allowing or letting mankind pursue immorality (e.g. removing His influence), the language demands a more active role by God.
- 1) As Moo puts it, God doesn’t just let the boat go, he gives it a push (p. 111)
  - 2) “Like a judge who hands over a prisoner to the punishment his crime has earned, God hands over the sinner to the terrible cycle of every-increasing sin” (Moo, p. 111)
- c. Vs 26-27 serves to further explain the reason for God giving them over to their immorality: **“For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 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.”**
3. The second way God’s wrath has been poured out is that He gave them over to a depraved mind (28-32): **“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,”**
- a. The word translated **“depraved”** refers to failing a test, becoming disqualified
- 1) Here the idea is that their minds have failed the test, their thinking is worthless, unable to reason properly
  - 2) This is evidence by the fact that they **“do those things which are not proper”**
  - 3) Look at the description Paul gives in vs. 29-31
- b. And all of this is done knowingly, willfully and with hearty approval: **“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.”**
- 1) When Paul wrote that they **“know the ordinance of God”** he uses a Greek word that means to **fully** know something **by experience**
  - 2) And what they fully know is that the consequences and penalty of such things is death

- 3) But yet they not only continue to do these things, but give “**hearty approval to those who do**”

Conclusion
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1. So there were three primary things we pointed out in the passage today:
  - a. God’s wrath is real and a result of our sin
  - b. God’s wrath is justified because mankind has suppressed the truth of God in unrighteousness
  - c. God’s wrath is evident in at least two punitive ways—He has given mankind over to his immoral ways and to his depraved mind
2. But what we must not forget is that God sent his son Jesus to protect us from His wrath, satisfy His justice and remove the penalty of sin
3. Remember how Paul started this discussion? “**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. 17 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."**
4. It is because every man faces the wrath of God for his or her sin that God provided a way out