

## Romans 1:18-23

We have just come from a few sentences telling us of the marvelous Gospel of Christ. We are told that in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed. From this high tower Paul takes a deep dive into the other side of the story. Paul describes the bad news of the human condition. He tells us what our human potential is worth in terms of righteousness. We will quickly see that the gospel is needed, precisely because of what mankind is. To anyone who takes language at all seriously, one cannot believe this portion of scripture and believe in the inherent goodness of man. Either Paul is a liar or mankind is in desperate need of salvation from above. What we need cannot and will not originate from mankind.

I think it is instructive that this book, a book primarily designed to lay out the Gospel in a clear, logical, and forceful manner, spends 2½ chapters talking about condemnation. If we follow Paul's example, or the Holy Spirit's example, we will dedicate much effort to talking about the bad news of man's sin and guilt when we tell people how they can be saved.

I think this statement from Griffith Thomas is very helpful in summing up the course of this passage. It can serve as a roadmap for the journey we are about to take. He said- We observe that sin starts from the neglect of light, which in turn leads to the rejection of light, followed by madness, idolatry, vice, manifold evil, and a malignant badness that takes a positive satisfaction in wrong-doing.

I'd like to suggest an outline for the next large section of Romans. The bold heading would be the wrath of God.

- Then 1:18-32 The condemnation of the primitive pagan
- 2:1-16 The condemnation of the self righteous sophisticate
- 2:17-3:8 The condemnation of the Jew
- 3:9-20 The condemnation of the world.

This was an outline that Mike suggested and it appears to me to be a good one.

<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,

#### Wrath

There are two greek words that are commonly translated wrath. There is thumos and orga. Thumos signifies a panting rage and comes from a root that means to breathe violently. It is as if a temper is suddenly lost and a fit of rage ensues. This is not the word used here.

The word used here is orge. This is an indignation that has risen gradually and is more settled. It was originally used to describe fruit when it was swollen with juice and then finally burst.

Thayer defines it as that in God which stands opposed to man's sin and man's disobedience, especially in resisting the gospel, and manifests itself in punishing the same. Wrath is a steadily building force.

This wrath is revealed. The verb tense means continually constantly revealed. It isn't a one time thing. It is being revealed. Here and now people are experiencing the wrath of God.

#### Revealed-

apokalupto

Thayer Definition:

1) to uncover, lay open what has been veiled or covered up to make known, make manifest, disclose what before was unknown

Throughout the history of mankind, God's wrath has been revealed from time to time. The flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues in Egypt, the Egyptian army being destroyed, Herod dying of worms. There have been

instances of God's wrath against rebellious mankind ever since God created man.

But the capstone display is in the wrath displayed in the gospel. The wrath of God was carried out on God's own son. Christ took on the full force of God's fury against sin when He died in our place.

Now the wrath of God is still building for those who will not learn the lesson, for those who will ignore what Christ has done, for those who will reject His sacrifice on their behalf.

Now we may ask, how is it being revealed? Don't the wicked often seem to prosper in this life and the righteous suffer? Don't the righteous often suffer at the hands of the wicked? How is this wrath being displayed?

There are two ways that this wrath is shown. One is what we could call passive. There is a built in order of things, a law like the law of gravity. Sin will punish us. There are consequences for sin. Few people would rush to sin if the full consequences were immediate. We are surrounded by people who are suffering from the consequences of sin. They are not happy or content. They run from one diversion to another, one experience to another, and they are looking for relief that they will never experience. They have guilt, remorse, regret, and sometimes physical and mental scars as a result of their sin. And they have no relief.

But God's present wrath goes even beyond that. God's common wrath to the average non believer is a wrath that most people would welcome. We find that it is an act of wrath on the part of God to "Give them over" God granting them freedom to do as they please is an expression of his wrath. God is withholding his relationship. He is removing his oversight for their good. In a small way it is like the stubborn young person who wants free from their parents intervention. One day the exasperated parent says, I can do nothing else. Have it your way. To the young person this is exactly what he wanted, what he yearned for. But the parent sees the event as it truly is. It is foolishness

unleashed. And the consequences are as predictable as they are disastrous.

This is the wrath on mankind that is being presently revealed. God is holding up his hands and saying, OK have it your way. And that, in itself, even devoid of the consequences of the sin, is wrath.

This wrath is a direct contrast to God's active involvement and shaping of His children's lives. God will cause His children to become miserable in their sin, even if there are **no** external consequences. God will not abandon a believer to a life of sin. But He is abandoning non believers to their lives of sin.

Secondly God sometimes actively displays his wrath on specific sins of non believers in this life. Even in the New Testament God saw to it that Herod was inflicted with worms in direct relationship to the sin he committed. We don't know when and where and to whom God will take these kinds of actions in this life.

But we do know that there is an appointed day of wrath some day in the future. This wrath will be toward all who have rejected Christ. The plans for it have already been revealed. And it will be a horrible day for anyone who has chosen not to repent. There will be nothing optional in this expression of wrath. Mankind will not eagerly greet this wrath. It will be active and effective and destructive. Every person who has refused the gospel and welcomed God's first expression of wrath will experience horror as they have never experienced it.

Some would look at this verse and mock. They would say, where is this wrath you speak of? I say no to Christ and nothing happens to me.

But what these folks lack is perspective. A day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day. Christ will come and he will judge. And while people may think his

current wrath is a good deal, they will think otherwise of God's day of wrath.

There is a story told by Mr. Barnhouse about a farmer who intentionally plowed his fields on Sundays, right next to the local church. He intended to be an irritation to those worshipping there and to prove a point that there is no price to pay for his wickedness. He wrote an article to a local newspaper making a point to that effect. He emphasized that his farm yielded the best crops in the whole county even though he did not honor God or believe in God. He taunted the editor with the question of how this could be if there truly was a God.

The editor wisely responded to the farmer's letter by saying one simple statement. He said "God does not always settle his accounts in the month of October". Or like Mike often says, payday isn't always Friday.

If God would not withhold his wrath on His own son, how do we hope to avoid that wrath if we reject His son?

It is from heaven. The wrath being explained in Romans 1 has no earthly source. It wasn't started by man and can't be stopped by man. Believers are responsible to report it, but it isn't our wrath. It is God's. It is a wrath that comes from an unbiased view with all the facts revealed. It is a wrath that originates in a court of perfect justice. We cannot liken our fits of rage to this kind of wrath. There is nothing impulsive about it. It does not consist of any lack of control. This is a wrath that must happen. To withhold it would be wrong and unjust.

Now who is this wrath directed to?

Against all ungodliness-  
unrighteousness of men,

ungodliness and unrighteousness are synonyms. The first stresses a faulty relationship to God, a lack of reverence and worship of God.

ungodliness asebeia

Thayer Definition:

1) want of reverence towards God, impiety, ungodliness

Unrighteousness *adikia*

Thayer Definition:

unrighteousness of heart and life, a deed violating law and justice

This second word stresses the results of that lack of regard and relationship with God. Being out of right relationship with God leads to a life that is lived contrary to God's law. This life will consistently do things that are not righteous, are not right, are not good. They are contrary to God, even when the actions look like virtues. Ungodliness is God directed. Unrighteousness is commonly man directed. When we are out of relationship with God we will mistreat our fellow man in one way or another.

This word for unrighteousness is from the same word that the word righteousness of God is from in verse 17. The gospel reveals the righteousness of God. Life without proper relationship to God reveals unrighteousness. And wrath is revealed against that unrighteousness.

who suppress the truth in unrighteousness-

suppress- **Thayer Definition:**

1) to hold back, detain, retain, to restrain, hinder (the course or progress of)

to check a ship's headway, i.e. to hold or head the ship  
We see here how unrighteous people deal with the truth of the Gospel. To suppress the truth implies that they know the truth. They recognize the truth. They are familiar with the truth. But in their unrighteousness, in their wrong actions coming from a wrong heart, they hold the truth down. They restrain it. They hinder it. It would travel like a ship to a predictable destination, but they will not allow it. The word used would imply that it would be easier to leave

the truth to its own course than to suppress it. Suppressing it takes effort. Men think they can stop the inevitable by denying it. They think because they do not believe in God's wrath that this will stop it from existing. They think that if they do not believe in God, God will never show up to demand justice.

Of all the futile actions of man, this has got to be the most futile. Yet, because there appears to be no immediate consequences to the action, it is the first response to truth by the unrighteous.

Seemingly intelligent men have come up with all kinds of theories.

They say:

God is dead

There is no God

God is evolving and pretty soon he'll be as nice as us.

It doesn't matter what we do.

God does not express wrath.

All roads lead to God.

And on and on and on. It is all the suppression of the truth by unrighteousness.

When God describes the source of a thought, of a teaching, of an action or of a lifestyle, never believe a person when they describe another. People making these things up may appear as sincere as the driven snow. But the underlying motive is a cover for unrighteousness. It is not revelation of truth but suppression of truth for an ulterior motive.

<sup>19</sup>because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them.

We have a because here. It appears to me this refers back to the fact that wrath is being displayed. Why? Because people know better. They know better but they choose worse.

Manifest- phaneroo

Thayer Definition:

1) to make manifest or visible or known what has been hidden or unknown, to manifest, whether by words, or deeds, or in any other way

to become known, to be plainly recognized, thoroughly understood

While God has not made the Gospel of Christ known to every man who walks on the planet, he has made **some** things know. He has given enough evidence that every man is accountable to respond to what he knows. And every man fails even at that point. There are many things that **may not** be known about God by anyone at any time. There are some things that may be known about God, but we would not know them unless God specifically communicates them to us in a language. The word of God is full of those types of things. No one can know the Gospel without hearing it or reading it. It is not apparent without special revelation. But there are other things that may be known about God simply by living on this planet. These are the things this verse is referring to. These are things that

1- may be known about God

2- God has made them plainly visible (They are manifest)

3- God purposed these things to have this effect (God has shown it to them)

God has revealed himself in such a way that his creation is immediately and thoroughly accountable to respond appropriately to the information. God did not leave anything to chance. He has created an accountability and no one escapes it.

Now where does man receive this revelation?

<sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His **eternal power** and **Godhead**, so that they are without excuse,

Creation is the source of this revelation. Our world is visible evidence of invisible attributes of God. When we see



the things that God has made we learn about the God who is invisible. We learn about what the God of this world is like.

Eternal

Power- dunamis

Thayer Definition:

1) strength power, ability

1a) inherent power, power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature, or which a person or thing exerts and puts forth

A person does not need to be a genius to figure out by looking at creation that God must be very strong. You could also see that God must be very old. Something outside of the planet must have acted upon this planet. There had to be the power of a creator doing creation. There had to be. So man can see the eternal dunamis.

We could easily fill a years worth of sermons at this point talking about the amazing creation of God. We could move from its enormity to its complexity, from it's beauty to its magnitude, from the atom to the universe. The man who says there is no God has a great deal of truth to suppress.

Godhead-G2305

### **theiotes**

Thayer Definition:

1) divinity, divine nature

Not **G2304**

### **Theios**

The general name of deities

Also the word used of the one and true God – used of the Father Son and Holy Spirit.

So a man cannot tell by looking at nature that there is a Father Son and Holy Spirit, but they can know that this God is merciful in his provisions. He provides food. He provides rain. He provides other people. He provides all we need. So we can learn about some of the traits of God from his creation.

<sup>21</sup>because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

The knowledge gained by observing God's creation is not enough to save a man, but it is enough to damn him. When a man observes creation he should endeavor to submit himself to that creator and do everything he can to find out what that Creator wants.

Very few do that.

**Men are not innocent because men are not ignorant.**

There is a story in the I Just Saw Jesus book about a Hindu who placed a pile of dried dung in front of images of Buddha, Mohammad and Christ. He prayed to God that God would light a fire in front of His representative. The fire lit in front of Christ. This man made it his life's pursuit to find someone who could tell him more about this Christ. That is the type of response that all men should have based on creation.

Where it says "they knew God", this is obviously a very limited knowledge. It is not the knowledge of the gospel. It is the knowledge of God as the creator. While it is not complete knowledge, it is profound knowledge. That knowledge is enough to lead to a reasonable response. If we have a creator, we should be **thankful** to the creator for creating us. We should immediately recognize our **obligation** to serve that creator. We should glorify that God, hold Him in the highest regard.

But that is not what happens. This scripture describes it clearly. These people became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened

Futile- mataioo

Thayer Definition:

1) to make empty, vain, foolish

Thoughts- dialogismos

1) the thinking of a man deliberating with himself

1a) a thought, inward reasoning

This is basically the conversation that goes on in your head. KJV calls it imagination. Mike will draw out the distinction between observation of the fact (what they knew) and the harm that is done after man's imagination (what they thought).

So the people became empty vain and foolish in their deliberations within themselves. Their thought essentially came to nothing of value. They were worthless.

Foolish- asunetos

1) unintelligent, without understanding, stupid

Heart- kardia- the core of what a person is.

1) the heart

2b1) the soul or mind, as it is the fountain and seat of the thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, endeavours

2b2) of the understanding, the faculty and seat of the intelligence

2b3) of the will and character

2b4) of the soul so far as it is affected and stirred in a bad way or good, or of the soul as the seat of the sensibilities, affections, emotions, desires, appetites, passions

Darkened- skotizo

1) to cover with darkness, to darken

2) to be covered with darkness, be darkened

We start with evil and we end up with stupid. People become illogical and absurd, not because they are stupid, but because they are evil. So their stupid center of their thinking becomes dark, with no light showing. Their wickedness makes sure that no light shows through.

Instead of observing what can be plainly seen, they start imagining, thinking, editing and creating.

Martin Lloyd Jones said that the whole drift toward modernism that has blighted the church of God and nearly destroyed its living gospel may be traced to an hour when men began to turn from revelation to philosophy. From observation to imagination.

This is the description of man's thought apart from God's revelation. Give a man long enough apart from God and this is always where they will end up. People respect Darwin, yet his heart became dark. He observed some amazing things in God's creation. But his inner thoughts were futile, going nowhere. He got creative and we see the results. There are any number of people that the world exalts as heroes, but this is true of them all. Their thoughts come to nothing of value.

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

Professing-phasko

1) to affirm, allege, portend or profess

These people affirm that they are wise. They appear to their fellow man that they have truly figured something out. But they know nothing of value. They are fools.

Fools- moraino

Thayer Definition:

1) to be foolish, to act foolishly

2a) to make foolish

2a1) to prove a person or a thing foolish

2b) to make flat and tasteless

2b1) of salt that has lost its strength and flavor

These worldly heroes are flat and tasteless. They carry nothing of the sweet savor of heaven. They are just more of the same. They aren't like the saint at all. They do not have a refreshing thought. It is all futile. All dark. All tasteless.

<sup>23</sup>and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

Incorruptible- aphthartos

- 1) uncorrupted, not liable to corruption or decay  
imperishable
- 2) immortal
  - 2a) of the risen dead

Corruptible- pthartos

- 1) corruptible, perishing

These people take that which is not liable to corruption, not like the day to day life we live, not subject to the laws we are subject to, and they bring it down to being just like us. They make God into something profane, earthly, limited, base. Instead of God being spirit as scripture describes him, they make him into a man or an eagle or a cow. And invariable when people do this they think they are honoring God and serving God.

When man refuses to worship God as He is, he will always find something to worship.

Idolatry is the end result of knowing God to some degree, but not submitting to Him, not being thankful to Him. Man will come up with a picture or an idea. It will make no logical sense at all. The prophets over and over showed the illogic of a man making a god and then worshipping it. But evil causes a man to make replacements.

One author described it as a seesaw. The more man glorifies man, the less they will honor and glorify the true God. And they will always find something less worthy to worship. It may be mankind as in humanism or people worship, they may worship the sun or the moon or the stars.

They may worship cows or rats or snakes or beetles. But they will always find something to worship that is utterly foolish and insane.

I believe a good application for us this week would be to take a hard look at our thoughts. Are they based on what God has said, or are they based on our clever figuring? Do they greet what scriptures says with a Yes Lord or a Yes But? Yes Lord comes from submission to revelation. Yes But comes from imagination. Yes Lord leads to a life lived like scripture describes it- power living from a powerful gospel, power over sin, power to live a new supernatural life. Yes But leads to a powerless life of excuses and theories. It is a life that does not portray the power the Gospel has to change people.

How are our lives best described? As Yes Lord lives or Yes But lives? Will we submit to the revelation this week, or will we display just how cleverly foolish we are? Will we embrace the truth or will we suppress it? Are we on a downward spiral of Romans 1 or an upward spiral of Romans 8?