



ROMANS 1:18-32

In the last lesson, Paul had been referring to the relationship with God into which people can enter through faith. Now, in contrast with that, he sets forth the wrath (judgment) of God which men and women must incur if they are deliberately blind to God and worship their own thoughts and imaginations. Sin as the root produces fruits that's are rotten (sins).

JUDGEMENT OF GOD

What was in Paul's mind when he used the phrase: "*wrath of God*"? In the Old Testament, the wrath of God is specially connected with the idea of the covenant people – Israel. The people of Israel were in a special relationship with God. He had chosen them and offered them this special relationship, which would continue as long as they kept his law (**Exodus 24:3-8**). That meant two things

1. It meant that, within the nation, any way in which the law was broken provoked the wrath of God, for it severed the relationship. When the Israelites were led away into Baal-worship, The Lord's anger was kindled against Israel (**Numbers 25:3**).
2. Further, because Israel stood in a unique relationship to God, any other nation which treated Israel with cruelty and injustice incurred the wrath of God.

Jewish religious thought from the prophets onwards was dominated by the idea of the two ages. There was this age which was altogether bad, and there was the golden age which was altogether good – the present age and the age to come. These two ages were separated by the day of the Lord. That was to be a day of terrible retribution and judgment, when the world would be shattered, sinners destroyed and a new order ushered in, God's kingdom on earth. It was then that the wrath of the Lord would go into terrible action. "*God will pour out upon the nations his indignation and all the heat of his anger*" (**Zephaniah 3:8**)

SINS ARE DEPLORABLE

To the prophets, the wrath of God was continually operating and would reach its peak of terror and destruction on the coming day of the Lord. One scholar has put it this way: Because he is God, because he is characteristically holy, **God cannot tolerate sin, and the wrath of God is his "*annihilating reaction*" against sin.**

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Romans Lesson 3 continued

Even the great reformer Martin Luther found it hard. He spoke of God's love as *God's own work*, and he spoke of His wrath as *God's strange work*. Further, Paul speaks of the wrath of God only three times. Romans 1:18, Ephesians 5:3-7 and Colossians 3:5-10.

In 1 Thess. 1:9-10 and 1 Thess. 5:9 he refers to the fact that believers **are not appointed** to God's wrath.

MORALITY

The whole message of the Hebrew prophets was that there is a moral order in this world. The conclusion is clear – that moral order is the will of God at work. God made this world in such a way that we break His laws at our peril. Now, if we were left solely at the mercy of our moral order, there could be nothing for us but death and destruction. The world is made in such a way that the person who sins must die. But into this human dilemma comes the love of God, by **an act of unbelievable free grace**, lifts us out of the consequences of sin and saves us from the wrath.

We cannot plead ignorance of God.

In the world, we see God. It is Paul's argument – and it is completely valid – that if we look at the world, we see that suffering follows sin. Break the laws of agriculture – your harvest fails. Break the laws of architecture – your building collapses. Break the laws of health – your body suffers. Paul was saying: "Look at the world! See how it is constructed! From a world like that, you know what God is like."

Those who sin are left without excuse.



SELF-DRIVEN

Paul says instead of looking to God, they looked to **themselves**. They involved themselves in futile speculations and thought they were wise, while all the time they were fools. They were fools because they made their ideas, their opinions, their speculations the standard and the law of life, instead of the revealed and declared Will of God.

The sinners' folly consisted in making **"man the master of things"**. They found their standards in their own opinions and not in the laws of God. They lived in a self-centred instead of a God-centred universe. Instead of looking to God, they walked looking to themselves, and, like people who do not look where they are going, they stumbled and fell.

Romans 1:21-23

For 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. ²² 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.

IDOLATRY

The result was idolatry. The glory of God was exchanged for images of human and animal forms. The root sin of idolatry is that it is selfish. People make idols. They bring offerings and address prayers to them. Why? So that their own schemes and dreams may be furthered. Their worship is for their own sake and not for God's glory. Life is not about our comforts, pleasures and purposes, but about God's pleasure, purpose and glory. The essence of sin is to put self in the place of God

The word translated as lusts or desires (epithumia) is the key to these verses. The stoics defined it as reaching after pleasure which defies all reason. It is a type of self-gratification. Epithumia is the passionate desire for forbidden pleasure. It is the desire which makes people do shameless things. It is the way of life of those who have become so completely immersed in the world of sin that they have ceased to be aware of God at all. It is a terrible thing to talk of God abandoning anyone. However, there are two reasons for that happening.

FREE WILL

God gave human beings free will. Without choice, there can be no goodness; and without choice there can be no love. A forced goodness is not real goodness; and a forced love is not love at all. If people deliberately choose to turn their backs on God after he has sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world, they must face the consequences.



When Paul speaks of God abandoning (gave them up) people to uncleanness, the word abandon has no angry irritation in it. It is a sorrowful regret, as of someone who loves and who has done all that can be done and can do no more. It describes exactly the feeling of the loving father in the parable of the prodigal son, when he saw his son turn his back on his home and go out to the distant country (Luke 15:11-32.)

ABANDONED SINNERS

In this word "abandon", there is more than that – there is judgment. It is one of the grim facts of life that the more we sin, the easier it is to sin. Some people may begin with a kind of shuddering awareness of what they are doing, and end by sinning without a second thought. It is not that God is punishing them; they are bringing punishment upon themselves and steadily making themselves the slaves of sin. "He who erects a fence around himself is fenced, and he who gives himself over is given over." Sin eventually takes control of us and we lose the power of choice to sinful behaviours and addictions.

Romans Lesson 3 continued

The most terrible thing about sin is the power we give it to rise to further sins. It is the awful responsibility of a free will that it can be used in such a way that in the end it is obliterated and people become the slaves of sin, self-abandonment to the wrong way. And sin is always a lie, because sinners think that it will make them happy, whereas in the end it ruins their lives, both for those who sin and for others, in this world and in the world to come.

UNPARALLELED IMMORALITY

It was an age of unparalleled immorality. There is nothing that Paul said about life in the Roman Empire that the Roman moralists had not already said themselves. The world needed the power that would work salvation, and Paul knew that nowhere else except in Christ did that power exist.



When people banish God from their lives, they take on certain characteristics, and in this passage is one of the most terrible descriptions in literature of the kind of men and women they become. As Shakespeare has it in Macbeth:

*I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none.*

THEY LOSE GODLINESS

Those who banish God not only lose godliness; they lose their essential **humanity too**. Let's consider some of these evils. The evil person is the person who robs both other people and God of their rights. They worship themselves to the exclusion of God and everyone else

QUESTIONS:

1. What are the three things God "gave them up to" mentioned in this passage of Romans?
2. Can you list some of the behaviours? (There are at least 24 mentioned)
3. What was the judgement they deserved, but ignored, and even condoned others who also practised such things?
4. How are these evils promoted in the world today?

DISCUSS:

As a Christian, do you understand what it means to "love the sinner, but hate their sin"?