

2. Wickedness and Wrath¹

Romans 1:18-32

Introduction

Have you ever got yourself into a difficult situation that you needed help to get out of? Have you ever been really stuck in some way and needed assistance in order to extricate yourself from the situation?

In the last study we saw that the apostle Paul was eager to preach the gospel in Rome because he believed that the gospel was the power of God for salvation. In verses 18 to 32 Paul begins to explain why people need salvation. People need to be saved because they are ungodly and wicked, and God's wrath is being revealed from heaven against them. This Paul explains in verses 18 and 19 which could be thought of as a heading for the next section of the letter which runs from these verses to verse 20 of chapter 3. In these chapter Paul makes that sin is a universal human condition deserving of divine judgment. Please read verse 18 to 32 to find out more about the predicament that all people find themselves in.

¹ God's wrath is his righteous anger against sin in which he rightly and fairly judges our sin and condemns it. It is very different from human anger which can be irrational and unfair generated out of self-pride or pity or desire for revenge. God's anger is fair and just. It is his opposition and condemnation of evil.

Human wickedness

The apostle Paul in in verses 18 to 23 described the ungodliness and wickedness of people in some detail. Please read these verses to understand the nature of this ungodliness and how God responds to it.

1. How is the ungodliness and wickedness² of people displayed?
2. Why are people without any excuse?
3. Why do people suppress the truth about God?
4. What results from this?

²² John Stott quotes J.B. Lightfoot who suggests that "*asebeia* is 'against God' and *adikia* 'against men'" and that the first "precedes and entails the second". BST, page 72

Think about it

God's wrath is being revealed against all ungodliness and wickedness. Who are the ungodly and wicked that this passage is talking about and what are they like?

What is revealed of God in creation? What should we know about God (See Psalm 19:1-6)?

Do you think that the apostle's words only condemn those who physically construct idols and worship them rather than God (see Col. 3:5)?

How ought people respond to God?

It is sometimes suggested that other religions are genuine attempts by people to draw near to the one true God. Do these verses support such an optimistic idea of human nature (c/f Romans 3:10-12)?

Divine wrath

The apostle says that the wrath of God **is** being revealed against all the godlessness and wickedness of men (18). Paul believed that the wrath of God was already being revealed in the world. His judgment was already being seen. Please read verses 24 to 32 to discover more about how the wrath of God has been revealed.

5 In these verses Paul says three times that God gave people over (24, 26, 28). What did he give them over to?

6. Why did he do this?

7. What shameful lusts have people been given over to?

8. What other things do people do that they ought not do?

9. How is the guilt of those who do such things highlighted (32)?

10. What is the penalty for doing these things?.

Think about it

What is the relationship between our sinful actions and our refusal to honour God?

Many today argue that people were born homosexual and that God made them that way and hence homosexual behaviour cannot be thought to be sinful. Do these verses agree with that assessment (see also Matthew 19:4-6)?

Are the people who are given over to sexual impurity any worse than those who are given over to a depraved mind who do the things that are listed in verses 29 to 31?

³ Stott, J. R. W. (2001). [*The message of Romans: God's good news for the world*](#) (p. 78). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Conclusion

People need to be rescued. They not only have refused to honour God, but they also have given expression to that rebelliousness by doing those things that God's righteous decree says deserve death. We not only do these things, but we also approve of those who practice them.

Think about it

How have people gotten themselves into such a mess?

Why is it that so many people seem to not be able to see that they need saving?

Going Further

1. Continue to learn the Romans 1:16 and if you have managed to be able to memorise it, please consider adding verse 17.

2. Please read Romans 2:1-16 several times in preparation for the next study. In these verses Paul moves from speaking about people generally and seems to have a specific group of people in mind. Who is Paul addressing in verse 1 where he wrote that “you have no excuse”?

3. Please read the parable of the two men who went to the temple to pray (Luke 18:9-14). To whom was this parable addressed to? What was wrong the attitude of the Pharisees towards the tax collector? How was the attitude of the tax collector different to this? Who went home justified (declared to be right with God) and why?