

# Romans – Justified through faith

## Week 4 – Romans 1:18 – 32 (Depraved gentile society)

Verse 18 – Paul uses the word “for/because” as everything he’s going to say about sin is meant to support the gospel. “Understanding sin is the foundation that upholds the preciousness of the gospel.” – John Piper

God reveals his glory (his eternal power and divine nature) in his creation.  
God reveals his wrath against those who suppress their knowledge of the creator.  
God reveals his righteousness (righteous way of getting sinners right with him).  
God reveals his power in believers by saving them.

### What is God’s wrath?

God’s wrath is totally different to human anger. God does not lose his temper; his wrath is not malicious or spiteful. If grace is God *acting* graciously, then wrath is God reacting in revulsion against sin. Wrath is God’s personal abhorrence of sin, holy hostility to evil, his refusal to condone it or come to terms with it; his wrath is his just judgement upon evil.

### What is God’s wrath revealed against?

It’s generally against evil alone. The essence of sin is godlessness – the attempt to get rid of God, which is impossible, but to live as if you had succeeded. The opposite of this being godliness; to love him with your whole being and to obey him with joy. God’s wrath is not directed against godliness and wickedness in a vacuum but against the godlessness and wickedness of those people who suppress the truth; not just doing wrong but a conscious decision to live for themselves.

### What truth is being suppressed?

Knowledge of God which is available through the natural order. Revelation through creation is a regular theme in scripture. Natural revelation is not ‘natural theology’ (or religion) it can point towards God but not make him known – Paul is saying that the knowledge of God from creation is enough to condemn you but not enough to save you. There’s no substitute for Jesus.

### How is God’s wrath revealed?

1<sup>st</sup> - at judgement day – the coming wrath  
2<sup>nd</sup> – in the present day through the public administration of justice (Rom 13:4)  
3<sup>rd</sup> – the present disclosure of the anger of God – being revealed from heaven now. This is through God abandoning stubborn sinners to wilful self-centredness. J Ziesler says “this operates by God’s non-intervention – letting men and women go their own way.”

The moral and spiritual degeneration is a judicial act of God.

Wrath in Greek is “orge” – God’s settled opposition to and displeasure with sin.

“The fact is that the subject of divine wrath has become taboo in modern society, and Christians by and large have accepted the taboo and conditioned themselves never to raise the matter.”  
- J I Packer

“Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing has happened.”  
- Winston Churchill

“The heavens tell of the glory of God.”  
- Psalm 19: 1-2

Paul goes on to repeat with horrifying emphasis the three stages of pagan depravity.

1. Exchange worship of God for idolatry. The west exchanges the worship of God for wealth, fame and power. Idolatry leads to (given over to) immorality. If you have a false image of God then you will have a false image of sex.



2. Exchange the Truth of God for lies – given over to shameful lusts, he specifies these as lesbian and homosexual practices. Exchange of the natural for the unnatural. Nature is God's created order – not our personal interpretation of it.



3. Since they did not see fit to retain knowledge of God he gave them over to an unfit mind. A depraved mind leads to anti-social behaviour, "ought not to be done", breakdown in human community, standards disappear and society disintegrates. Paul lists twenty-one vices!

J B Phillips refers to gossips, libel, slanders as "whisperers behind doors, stabbers in the back without brains, honour, love or pity."

Still the small inward voice I hear  
That whispers all my sins forgiven  
Still the atoning blood is near  
That quenched the wrath of hostile heaven

- Charles Wesley's "And Can It Be."

"Unrighteousness is; loving sin more than loving God and His truth."

- John Piper

In summary they know they deserve death ("the wages of sin are death" – Rom 6:23), they know it, their conscience condemns them. They disregard this knowledge, encourage others and approve of others who do so.

- Q1. Nothing keeps people away from Christ more than their inability to see their need of him, or their unwillingness to admit it. Can you give examples from your own experience?

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- Q2. For which modern obsession are you most tempted to exchange the glory of the living God? How can this be avoided?

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The biblical order for gospel presentation is first warning of danger and then the way of escape, first the judgement on sin then the means of pardon, first the bad news of guilt then the good news of grace.

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen." Romans 1:20