

Romans 1:18-23**Sin and the wrath of God****The fall of human beings**

Jen's drivers learn their route by going back again and again, and we will become more familiar with the Bible as we go back again and again! We will recap last week and drive on just a little.

Rom 1:17 *For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

This is the gospel in a nutshell, the gospel boiled down to the bare essentials. The way people can be put right with God is by faith – not any old faith, but faith in Jesus (see Romans 3:26).

Sin and the wrath of God

However we won't have any conviction we need to be put right with God unless we realise we are wrong with God. In Romans 1:18-3:20 Paul argues that all are sinners – that means everyone! (Romans 3:9, 23)

Romans 1:18-20	All people – under God's wrath	
Romans 1:21-32	People apart from God's special revelation	(the pagan)
Romans 2:1-16	People who rely on their righteousness	(the moralist)
Romans 2:17-3:8	People who rely on their religion	(the Jew)
Romans 3:9-20	All people – are sinners	

The idea of being a sinner may sound offensive but we have to admit that the world is in trouble. Humans are able to do wonderful things in science, but the same science is harnessed with great destructive power in modern warfare. Humans can create great works of literature, but the same words can be used with devastating effect to destroy lives.

Paul is arguing that we need a right diagnosis before we will accept the right treatment. If we are diagnosed with cancer, we will likely feel a sense of fear and devastation. But we will be ready to receive the right treatment! As we go through Romans 1:18-3:20 we may feel something of that devastation and fear as the disease is diagnosed. If you feel that – it is called conviction of sin – it is evidence that God is working in your life by His Spirit in love and grace. It's only after 3:20 we hear the welcome message, "You're not going to die: there is a cure!"

The diagnosis begins with a statement in 1:18 concerning God's wrath. Our Bibles usually have a heading before 1:18, but it seems to me Paul doesn't draw breath between 1:17 and 1:18 – they are parallel verses and linked:

Rom 1:17 **For** *in it* *the righteousness of God* *is revealed* *from* *faith to faith*

Rom 1:18 **For** *the wrath of God* *is revealed* *from* *heaven*

We see from this, a) the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel saves us from wrath, and b) wrath works salvation because ultimately wrath is the means by which God's enemies are swept away. In the end,

Hab 2:14 *The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*

How are we to understand God's wrath? Is it,

1. Good or bad?

The idea of God's wrath is always open to misunderstanding because we too easily think about human anger. Human anger is sinful, hurtful, impulsive and selfish. But God's anger is only righteous, and only works against all that is wrong and unjust and wicked in the world.

Exodus 34:6 *The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.*

God's anger reassures us that evil won't go on forever and won't go unpunished.

2. The exception or the rule?

Isaiah described God's wrath (of bringing the Chaldeans against Israel) as God's *strange work, his alien task* (Isaiah 28:21). John Wesley called it a strange work because the judgment "*was contrary to the compassion of His own nature, and to the usual way of dealing with his people.*" We can see that wrath is God's strange work because,

2Pe 3:9 *The Lord ... is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.* (see also Psalm 103:9-10).

God's wrath is not contrary to His love. A doctor committed to your highest good will want to save your life, but he has to tell you the bad news first. The wrath of God revealed from heaven is God telling us the bad news to get our attention.

3. Cause or effect?

Is God's wrath directly *caused* by God, or is it the natural *effect* of human sin? If we are an alcoholic we can expect liver problems. If we gossip we can expect relationship problems etc.

In the Old Testament God's wrath is described as,

- a) A high wall which is cracked and bulging out, which all of a sudden comes crashing down (Isaiah 30:13). Was / is the financial crash caused directly by the finger of God on the idol of Money, or is it the effect of human greed and corruption?
- b) A moth (Hosea 5:12). A moth gradually eats away at the garment until it falls apart. Do you think British 'Christian' society is being steadily eroded away? In what way? (see also Luke 12:33)

In Romans 1 the picture of wrath is one of God lifting or removing his hand of protection. "*he gave them over*" - *he gave them over to their sinful desires* (Romans 1:24,26,28)

Turning from our Creator is ultimately a very serious matter indeed.

The fall of human beings

Romans 1:20-32 is a description of the first century pagan world, not everyone, but the mass of humanity. At this point the moralists and religious people will be nodding in agreement with Paul. How did the world get into such a mess?

In Romans 1:21-23 Paul explains how, in 7 downward steps:

1. They knew (of) God – from General Revelation in creation (v20)
2. They glorified Him not
3. Neither were they thankful
4. Their thinking became futile
5. Their foolish hearts were darkened
6. They claimed to be wise but became fools
7. They exchanged the glory of God for idols



This starts with God and finishes with idolatry, a God replacement. Left to themselves human beings fall away from God; they never evolve towards God.

Physically species tend to lose genetic information, not gain it.

Morally, human beings go downwards (except for the grace of God.)

Intellectually, human beings are liable to boast and claim to be wise, yet be fools in God's sight.

Spiritually, we get further and further away from God and make substitutes which are not God. The greatest substitute we can make is to make ourselves god and to think we are masters of our own destiny: we are not.

All wonderful human creativity and progress can be brought to nought because the fatal flaw – SIN!

Jer 17:9 *The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*

There is certainly no human cure for human sinfulness, but there is a divine cure. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ, in which a righteousness from God is revealed, by faith!