

ROMANS

Session_3

1:18-32

Setting The Stage

After his introduction into the “good news of God” Paul specified that God had made promises throughout history to His people as revealed on the pages of scripture through the law and prophets. He narrowed that down to the promised Son of David who actually was declared with power to be the Son of God; He was God in the flesh. The ultimate verification of this was His bodily resurrection from the dead.

Paul then declared Jesus Christ Lord and as in verses 16 & 17 he makes the great statement about the just being saved by faith and not being ashamed of the gospel. He also mentioned for the first time in the letter the word salvation. Three important questions arise from these two verses; 1) If the gospel is “God’s good news” then how could it bring shame? 2) If the gospel is the power of God unto salvation humanity must ask salvation from what? 3) What is saving faith?

From 1:18 to 3:20 Paul will make the case from God’s holy standard against all humanity. He will demonstrate that all are guilty before God and without excuse. There will be no defense that can be given when confronted by the Lord. From the most uncivilized to the most sophisticated; from the Gentile who had not been given God’s specially revealed law to the Jew who had the privilege of possessing that law. Ultimately all are found guilty and have the very wrath of God abiding on them.

To bring this sort of scathing indictment before humanity invokes resistance, rebellion and in many cases deep hostility to the point of murderous intentions. Furthermore to suggest that unrepentant humanity has the wrath of God abiding on them which will result in eternal judgment in hell brings even more hostility. There is great temptation to be ashamed of telling the truth. Yet it is this very bad news that the Holy Spirit uses in the granting of repentance to bring about the confession of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation from this very wrath. The matter of what saving faith looks like will follow from 3:21 onward.

Gods Wrath on Unrighteousness

1:18-19) "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them."

Wrath of God revealed - Gods wrath is not some momentary outburst of impatience on the part of God as scripture makes it clear that God is long-suffering and slow to anger (Ex 3:4; Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joe 2:13; Jon 4:2; Nah 1:3). This revelation of man’s sin is not a one time thing that Paul is talking about, rather it is continually “in the process” of being revealed. In 9:22 Paul states it as “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction”; those that will be eternally judged are preparing themselves for destruction.

Gods wrath is demonstrated here and now through the direct consequences of sin and through His direct intervention as revealed in scripture (ei. the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, plagues on Egyptians, judgments of Israel; etc.). The supreme evidence of sin is the aging and eventual death of our bodies (6:23; Gen 2:17)

ROMANS

Session_3

1:18-32

While the wrath of God is revealed against man individually and upon societies as a whole, the most extreme demonstration of God's wrath was in what was poured out on His Son! His perfect Son not only endured the gross sin of man in His crucifixion but Jesus endured the complete separation from His fellowship with His Father and endured the weight of holy wrath on the sin that was placed on Him.

Paul will show how God's wrath is revealed in a progression. From fallen humanity's natural rejection of God to God abandoning humanity to its utter folly. From the immediate natural consequences of sin in real time to the wrath expressed in the Day of the Lord and finally at the white throne judgment.

Ungodliness - this describes any thought or compulsion that would be in opposition to the nature of the one true God of creation. Natural rebellion exists in the heart and mind that would deny devotion to and reverence for God. This leads to acts of sin.

Unrighteousness - the deeds that are manifest as a result of what is in the heart and mind. James tells us that "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. (Jas 2:10 esv)" While it only takes one single sin to prove unrighteousness, the very nature of our unrighteousness is continually on display. The primary bent of ungodliness and unrighteousness bring about one primary filter through which fallen humanity discerns and disseminates knowledge; the unrighteous -

Suppress the truth - Satan, who is the father of lies (Jhn 8:44), lied to Eve to entice her and Adam into sin. As a result through the fall, the unrighteous (all humanity) have as their trademark a hostility to the truth. This truth Paul says God has made plain to them through:

- 1) Creation (v.20)
- 2) Conscience (1:19; 2:14).

This is what it means to be made in the image of God and is a mystery! While on the one hand "no one seeks after God" (3:11), on the other it is not because individuals haven't been given a conscience or the evidence as to His existence. When the Son of God appeared to His own people, there could not have been more evidence of God given the works of Jesus. He gave the reason for this perpetual bent to suppress the truth:

"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed." [Jhn 3:19-20 ESV]

1:20) "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

ROMANS

Session_3

1:18-32

His invisible attributes... have been clearly perceived - God declares through Paul that creation itself gives testimony to God's creative power and His divine nature. He not only created with great care, precision and provision, He also sustains all things constantly. Paul sums it up in Rom 9:36 where he writes "*from Him, through Him and to Him are all things.*" In his letter to the Colossians Paul writes concerning Jesus "*And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*" [Col 1:17 ESV]. David writes in the Psalms:

"To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard." [Psa 19:1-3 ESV]

After great tragedy and a long struggle with his wife, friends and inner being, Job questions and then is confronted by God with a long set of declarative questions that speak to the obvious sovereign power of God displayed in what He has made both in the heavens and in the earth. Written in Job 38 through 41 is one of the most compelling arguments God has set forth in a series of rhetorical questions asking Job where he was when God created the heavens and the earth.

The final verdict on humanity is that with all of the evidence in mind; creation and their own conscience, God has rendered each person to be ***without excuse!*** This will be the response of God at the final judgment. Paul continues to explain the downward progression of thought within the fallen nature:

1:21) "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened."

Although they knew God - This is speaking to what Paul has just declared; that is God's general revelation through what has been made and the care that has gone into creation itself. The fallen nature does the opposite of what God is due. Humanity doesn't ***honor Him as God***. The high calling of God on humanity is that He be pursued with the heart and mind (Deu 6:5). It is the highest end of humanity to worship God and scripture constantly commands that God be worshiped:

"Sing to the LORD, all the earth! Tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his place. Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him! Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth; yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved." [1Ch 16:23-30 ESV]

Nor did they give thanks to Him - In addition to not honoring God, the second categorical rebellion is expressed in the refusal to render thanksgiving to the Lord.

ROMANS

Session_3

1:18-32

"A Psalm for giving thanks. Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations." [Psa 100:1-5 ESV]

Assuming their own autonomy, humanity fails to recognize that it is not through human thought or power that the heart beats, the mind functions, breath is drawn, the cells function; etc. Jesus says that God causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust (Mt 5:45) that He is patient and that all good things come from above (Jas 1:17; Act 14:15-17). Giving thanks is recognizing this truth.

Honoring God with our hearts and minds produces godliness. *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction"* (Pro 1:7 ESV). When the knowledge of the Lord is suppressed, all thinking becomes **futile**. In biblical history there is no one recorded who had been given so much material and mental blessing as Solomon, yet as he pursued every conceivable worldly pursuit of physical and mental nature he came to this conclusion that *"all is vanity"* (Ecc 1:2).

The escalating result of continual suppression of the truth is a consuming darkness:

1:22-23) "Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things."

Humanity will always worship something as it has been built into the human condition by God. In darkness the mind cannot break free from the confines of the here and now through the material, philosophical and "spiritual" pursuits of this dying world (see Ecc.). In Revelation, Jesus describes those who are in darkness as "those who dwell on the earth" (Rev 3:10;6:10; 8:13; 11:10). It is a way of describing a way of thinking that has rejected God and His kingdom and lived to define themselves in terms of this age that is passing away (See Luk 12:13-21).

Idolatry is sin (Exo 20:3-6). Paul explains that *"an idol has no real existence,"* and that *"there is no God but one"* (1Cor 8:4). At the same time he also explains what is behind the idols:

"What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?" [1Co 10:19-22 ESV]

Even after the severe plagues that God will bring about in the final years of this passing world; when humanity even understands that the God of heaven is carrying out His divine judgment, Jesus describes the response of

ROMANS

Session_3

1:18-32

the earth dwellers after 1/3 of humanity has been wiped out:

"The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts." [Rev 9:20-21 ESV]

Gods Wrath Expressed In Abandonment

1:24-25) "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."

Therefore God gave them up - He gave them up for the fact that they exchanged the truth about God for a lie worshiping the created thing rather than the Creator - which he just explained (vv. 22-23). The result is that God "gave them up". This giving over is expressed in many ways in scripture and is basically the removing of His restraining grace that is exercised on the fallen nature of humanity so that all inhibition from the mind concerning sinful pursuits becomes removed.

Later in this letter (chap 9) Paul recollects the interaction of God with Pharaoh in order to demonstrate His power. God removed any restraining grace exerted upon Pharaoh in order that his heart would go the natural direction of full hardening toward God. God's eschatological response to the perpetual rejection of the gospel by several millennia of human generations will result in a singular (all unbelievers) "giving over":

"[Even him], whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." [2Th 2:9-12 KJV]

To the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves - This is a summary statement of what Paul details in the next several verses. In the beginning God created man as male and female:

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." " [Gen 1:27-28 ESV]

As a result of God removing His restraining grace in judgment, the image of God continues in its downward spiral of corruption going against the established order of God in creation. The fallenness of humanity has a drive toward self destruction and in this age is guided along by the "thief who comes to steal, kill and destroy" (John 10:10).

ROMANS

Session_3

1:18-32

The impurity described here is that of sexual sin. As the drive for physical intimacy is no longer restrained by the context of what God had intended it for within the context of marriage, it becomes impure and dishonors God and humanity. Physical intimacy expressed outside the union of marriage and in adultery are both impure acts of sin against God and are destructive (2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3; 1The 4:7). When unrestrained and all avenues of sensual pleasure are exhausted humanity continues to push for and spiral down into more and more degrading passions:

1:26-27) "For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error."

Natural relations... contrary to nature - Once again we see God furthering His removal of His gracious restraint and allowing humanity to pursue even more degrading passions to the point that the design of nature itself is perplexed. The whole design of God in nature is that a male and female within its own kind be fruitful and multiply. For humanity, made in the image of God, God made male and female to become one flesh, not just in reproduction, but in complete mental, physical and spiritual bond (Eph 5:31; Gen 2:18-24). In this context lived out according to the plan of the creator, a man and wife have the highest and closest privilege of modeling the relationship between God and man; specifically that of Christ to His bride (Eph 5:31-33).

According to Genesis 1 & 2, man being created in the image of God is complete in "male" and "female"; each one possessing qualities assigned by God to be a complete image. Therefore if half is missing as God intended within the marital union, it is a mockery of His created order. All sexual sin openly celebrated, promoted and participated in becomes a gateway to the total destruction of society since the God intended role of procreation and societal structure is treated with complete contempt.

The due penalty - This speaks to the law of sowing and reaping (Gal 6:7,8). While there will be a final eschatological judgment on all sin, there are immediate consequences that are very likely to be suffered as a result of the deliberate, continual breaking of God's law. Many of the consequences of habitual violations of God's law have life-long effects even if eventually repented of.

1:28-31) "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless."

This is the disintegration of society. What began with denying God His due honor and thankfulness moved through replacing Him with gods of human invention inspired by demons and progresses through all kinds of foolish thinking to the point of the destruction of the most basic elements of a successful, God designed society. Beyond sexual perversion amongst adults comes all kinds of other sexual wickedness as we see in our society today. We have now moved into the realm of imagining that children should be preyed upon and that

ROMANS

Session_3

1:18-32

their innocence be destroyed to satisfy the bizarre imaginations of depraved minds who claim that science is god while denying the very facts of biology. From child sex trafficking to the physical mutilation of god-given and god-ordained bodies, humanity is certainly boastful in its sinful pursuits of all manner of evil that it has invented. The hatred of the true God is an openly celebrated concept and any who would dare to stand in the way become instant targets of the forces of evil and godlessness.

These conditions can be witnessed through history in cyclical patterns and have brought about the destruction of many empires as the Lord has moved in judgment. Israel's history is certainly a clear example of this demonstrating success when God is acknowledged and worshiped to utter destruction and failure when God was ignored and defied. In the days of Noah humanity as a whole reached the apex of the total and complete expression of what Paul is describing here to the point that God rendered this verdict on all humanity:

"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." [Gen 6:5 ESV]

This along with the sin of the angels (Gen 6; 2Pet 2:4,5; Jude 1:6) led to the total corruption of all flesh (Gen 6:12) and brought the flood that spared nothing except Noah and his family. The ultimate destiny for humanity is to once again reach this same universal fruit of godlessness that will bring about its fiery judgment as Peter reminds humanity:

"This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly." [2Pe 3:1-7 ESV]

Revelation also describes the universal expression of humanities utter wickedness under the lying signs and wonders of the wicked one reaching a point of "ripeness" that brings about the climax in the Day of the Lord return of Christ:

"Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords." [Rev 19:11-16 ESV]

ROMANS

Session_3

1:18-32

The fact that humanity is “without excuse” and naturally full of sin and rebellion against the creator will be at the peak of display at the end of the millennial reign of Christ. According to Revelation 20, Christ will have reigned on earth for 1,000 years with Satan and the spiritual forces of darkness bound in the abyss for the entire duration of that reign. With no evil influence other than what dwells in the hearts of natural men after multiple generations, the final rebellion will display the natural rebellion of sinful humanity against the Lord who will have been on physical display for all to see:

"And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." [Rev 20:7-10 ESV]

The final stages of societal degradation in its rebellion against the Lord is when all these things that Paul describes are openly embraced, celebrated and participated in. Just like the days of Lot, when the angels went to Sodom, the men of the town sought to force them to participate in their evil acts (Gen 19:4-11); it was not enough to leave them alone. Paul finalizes this crescendo of societal breakdown in the pursuit of sin with this summary statement:

1:32) "and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them." [NASB95]

As Paul progresses on in the next several chapters, he will make it clear that left alone and without the intervention of God’s grace, no human being would move toward God in a way that would generate salvation.