

1. **Introduction:** Since chapter 1 verse 18, Paul has been writing about human moral rebellion against God. He began in verse 18 saying “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven” against all ungodliness and unrighteousness.
 - He mentions several things rebellious people do. (1.) They suppress truth about God. (2.) They refuse to glorify or worship Him as God. (3.) They do not give thanks to God for what He has provided.
 - God’s wrath at this behavior results in their minds becoming “darkened” and their thinking foolish.
 - Paul says God wrath is revealed when He abandons people involved in perversion to continue in their perversion (verse 1:24, 26, and 28).
 - People engaged in sin often delight in doing as they please and resent any and all constraints.
 - The universe including its moral and physical laws were created by God. For example, there is a physical law of gravity. Drop a dish and it falls to the floor.
 - Sin is like gravity. It may seem you can sin without incurring any bad effects, but without opposing moral forces, sin always pulls a person toward the moral bottom. God’s moral restraining power opposes sin’s downward pull.
 - Moral rebellion causes people to drift downward into increasing depths of sin. If that continues, God eventually “gives them up” by removing His moral restraint, leaving them to do as they please.
 - Like the father of the prodigal son, God releases them, permitting them to leave taking with them the talents and physical wealth He provided, but they forfeit His restraining moral force.
 - Is “giving someone up” permanent? Not necessarily. As the parable of the prodigal son teaches, God will welcome them back when they come to their senses, return, repent and seek forgiveness.
 - The current widespread moral turmoil and chaos in our world provides present-day evidence of God’s wrath.

2. **Romans 1:24-27:** *“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. ²⁶For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷and 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.”

- God’s abandonment of people seems intended to bring people to their senses. It could end in eternal damnation, but as long as it is God’s day of grace, hope remains. God can bring people to their senses no matter how sinful they are.
- The Bible uses “gave them up” in two different senses.
- The first sense is used in this passage. God withdraws His restraining protective hand at least for a time and allows **natural** consequences of sins to take their inevitable destructive course.
- The other meaning deals with supernatural consequences.
- A life with no moral constraints has the natural effect of moving steadily deeper into sin’s depths.
- One example given by Paul is people exchanging the truth about God for a lie and worshipping and serving created things rather than the Creator. Following that path leads to God giving them up to dishonorable passions, allowing them to do as they please without constraint.
- Inevitably people choose to follow the lusts of their hearts leading to sensual and spiritual enslavement in debauchery and moral degradation.
- God “giving people up” does not cause them to sin.
- Instead, a life of pervasive sin is the cause of God “giving them up.”
- “Giving a person up” is an example of God’s judicial wrath in action.
- The specific sin of verses 1:26-27 is homosexuality, described as unnatural sexual relations between men with men and women with women.
- “Natural” in Scripture always refers to things falling within the intent of God’s original creation.
- Men and women were created to be complements of one another.
- Marriage was ordained to bring a pair of complements together in a permanent relationship of unity.
- Are sexual sins the worst of sins? No! Does committing sexual sin inevitably result in eternal condemnation? No!
- By the grace of God, He has revealed in the gospel a righteousness, backed up by His omnipotent power, that brings salvation to everyone who believes, no matter what their former sins have been.
- Covetousness and lust lead to a great variety of sins including sexual sin.

3. **Romans 1:28-32**: *“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. ²⁹They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰slanders, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”*

- When people fail to acknowledge God, He gives them up to a debased mind.
- A debased mind makes poor judgements.
- Paul gives a long list of sins that are consequences of a debased mind.
- Examining this devastating list one cannot avoid noticing the sins listed are not rare in today’s world.
- These verses provide supporting evidence for what theologians call “total depravity.” Total depravity does not mean that a person is as bad as possible. It simply means every human faculty is affected by sin.
- Paul has said God’s wrath is specifically directed toward people who suppress truth for the sake of evil. Is there hope for such people?
- Yes! The righteousness revealed in the gospel is for all who believe, no matter what their former sins happened to be.
- Jesus lived a perfect life under the Law thereby earning righteousness. Jesus’ righteousness is imputed to each person who believes.
- The imputed righteousness legally justifies each believer before God, restoring the believer to God’s favor, pardoning them from sin’s penalty, and hence freeing them from being an object of God’s judicial wrath.

4. **The Effect of Sin on a Person’s Life**: It seems logical that people who experience tragic consequences from sin would repent and seek God. Strangely, the opposite is often true.

- Even when aware of sin’s consequences, people tend to cling to their sin. They prefer to pretend that God doesn’t exist.
- That attitude leads God to give such people up to a debased mind, making them unable to make right judgments.
- A debased mind ultimately leads to a complete surrender to sin. Paul gives a long list of specific sins. Does his list include all possible sins? No!

- Those who do not see fit to acknowledge God are given up to a debased mind. About the long list of sins in 1:28-32, Paul says, *“Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”*
- Sexual sin, which receives so much attention in other places, is not specifically mentioned but is certainly included in the “all manner of unrighteousness.”

5. Different Moral Codes: Everyone lives by some moral code. Some codes are more in line with God’s moral code than others.

- Not everyone in Paul’s world fit the pattern of blind idolatry and hideous vice.
- Many, but not all, Gentiles in Paul’s world did live thoroughly immoral lives.
- Paul’s point is twofold: (1.) No one can consistently follow whatever moral code they accept. (2.) Even if they could, they would still fall short of God’s requirement of being holy as He is holy.

6. Paul’s Conclusions are Timeless: Paul wrote at a particular time and place, but his conclusions about people are timeless because human nature remains the same. People continue to be selfish, to covet and to lust.

- As Paul examined the culture in which he lived, he saw around him a world of widespread ungodliness and unrighteousness.
- Yet even in the midst of widespread depravity, there were people of higher moral stature. Romans like Seneca would say “I agree” to most of Paul’s ethical statements as well as to his description of the prevailing depravity.
- Most Jews would not knowingly violate God’s Law. Pharisees went to extreme lengths to obey their interpretation of the Law.
- But Paul’s conclusion is that even the most moral and well-intentioned people all fall short of God’s requirement to be holy as He is holy.
- His examination of various categories of people convinced him all unredeemed humanity falls short and is subject to God’s wrath.
- Everyone needs to be righteousness in a way acceptable to God, but only God has the power and ingenuity to make that happen.
- People can do nothing in their own strength and knowledge to achieve the righteousness required to be “in the right” before God.
- Paul’s message is that God loves His rebellious people and has made His own provision to provide “salvation” which is able to save even the most depraved sinner if they believe. Trust God and be transformed into a likeness of Christ!

- Paul declares that he is the worst of sinners. Yet the risen Lord Jesus came personally to Paul and regenerated him. He received the righteousness of God. God called him to leave his current life and live for Christ as an Apostle. God can will save even the worst of sinners.

7. **Given Up by God to Supernatural Consequences:** The second meaning of “gives them up” refers to God’s wrath by direct, supernatural intervention.

- There are many examples in Scripture of “giving people up” to Gods’ supernatural wrath.
- For example, several instances in the OT describe God “giving up” rebellious people by subjecting them to His wrath through supernatural acts of judgement.
- Two examples: Noah’s flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- Neither event was a natural consequence of sin. Both were overt supernatural expressions of God’s judgment and wrath on gross unrepentant sin.
- John 3:36 helps understand God’s judgement wrath as it applies today. *“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”*

Chapter 2

8. **People with Higher Moral Standards:** In chapter 1 Paul has considered depraved people of the Gentile world. In chapter 2 he begins to examine people who strive to live by higher moral standards.

- Paul has dealt with shameless immorality and “anything is OK” morals (1:18-32). In (2:1-16) he considers people who have stricter moral codes (2:1-16).
- Paul’s focus continues to be on lifestyle and attitudes of people without Christ.
- One observation is that people with strict moral codes tend to be lenient as they apply the moral code to themselves, but much stricter in applying the code to other people.
- In chapter 2, Paul’s first point is directed toward people who know what sin is and prove it by their condemnation of sin in other people’s behavior.
- By judging the sins of others, they condemn themselves if they practice the same kinds of things they condemn in others.
- The critical issue is that, unlike the people of 1:18-32, those Paul is now talking about are people who acknowledge there is “wrong” which is different from “right.” They prove their knowledge by condemning “wrong” in other people’s lives.

9. **Romans 2:1-3**: *“Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. ²We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. ³Do you suppose, O man – you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself – that you will escape the judgement of God?”*

- There is no excuse for condemning in others things you do yourself.
- Recognizing and judging sin is not in itself wrong. It is wrong to fail to condemn yourself for things you condemn in others.
- God’s wrath is revealed against everyone who practices ungodliness and unrighteousness – against thoughts, words, emotions, and/or deeds that are inconsistent with His holiness.

10. **Two Groups**: Both the depraved people of 18-32 and the more moral people of 2:1-16 have sufficient knowledge about God from creation to make them without excuse.

- Both group’s behavior contradicts what they know about God (1:32; 2:12).
- The first group does what they know to be wrong, and they approve (applaud) others who do the same things. They are consistent in approving wrong behavior in themselves and in others.
- The second group is somewhat different. They too do what they know to be wrong, but they are inconsistent in that they condemn others for doing similar things. They are both wrong and hypocritical. God condemns them for both their actions and attitude.
- If moral faculties are so well developed that we feel we can accurately judge the behavior of others, we can hardly plead ignorance of our own moral misbehavior.
- Condemnation of others automatically condemns us if we do similar things.
- Paul does not say we should suppress our critical faculties, or that we should never rebuke sin (in ourselves or others).
- What he argues against is a hypocritical double standard in which we excuse sins we commit but condemn the same sins in others.

11. **Romans 2:4**: *“Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”*

- Paul completes these verses by reminding us that the purpose of God’s forbearance, patience, and kindness is to give us a space in which to repent. It is never to provide an excuse or opportunity for sinning.

12. **God’s Judgment:** In 2:1-4 Paul makes it clear God’s judgment is inescapable because He is holy, and sin is real and pervasive.

- Think of the sins listed in 1:28-32. Who is not guilty of all or some of these sins? Who has fully and truly honored God?
- Who can say they have never in thought, word, feelings, or deeds coveted, envied, or been deceitful?
- Who has never gossiped, never been insolent, haughty, boastful, or disobedient to parents?
- Paul’s point is no person can truthfully say they always fully honor God and have never committed any sin. Failing to meet God’s standard doesn’t just mean doing blatantly immoral things. Anything inconsistent with God’s holy character or laws is sin.
- In 2:5-11 Paul will note God’s judgment against sin is righteous.
- In 2:12-16 he will note God’s judgment against sin is impartial.
- God’s judgment against sin is inescapable, righteous, and impartial. Only salvation wrought by Jesus can save us from condemnation and judgment.

13. **Romans 2:5:** *“But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.”*

- Claiming ignorance of God and His moral standards willfully ignores the knowledge He reveals about Himself. In the face of His natural revelation available to everyone, to refuse to seek, thank, and worship Him is willful rejection of Him despite plain knowledge.
- Rejecting natural revelation shows contempt for His patient kindness.
- A hard, impenitent heart leads to continuing sin. Acts of sin store up wrath. Each sin stores up the wrath it justly deserves. Only repenting and turning to Jesus for salvation eliminates stored-up wrath.
- God’s wrath is not only saved up until the final judgment day. His wrath is revealed and ongoing in the here and now.

14. **How is the Wrath of God Revealed:** Robert Haldane in his commentary on Romans talks about this issue.

- He said, *“It was revealed when the sentence of death was first pronounced, the earth cursed, and man driven out of the earthly paradise, and afterward by such examples of punishment as those of the deluge, and the destruction of the cities of the plain by fire from heaven...”*
- *But above all, the wrath of God was revealed from heaven when the Son of God came down to manifest his divine character ... that wrath was displayed in his sufferings and death, in a manner more awful than by all the tokens God had before given of his displeasure against sin.*
- *Besides this, the future and eternal punishment of the wicked is now declared in terms more solemn and explicit than formerly. Under the new dispensation, there are two revelations given from heaven, one of wrath, the other of grace.”*
- That is a powerful statement of truth about God’ wrath. But Paul’s major point is that the wrath of God is revealed most clearly in sin’s constant debilitating downward drag on our lives.
- We tend to think it is OK if we sin just a little bit. But it is not. Sin captures us and pulls us downward. Eventually, if we are allowed to continue to sin long enough, we will begin to call what is good, evil and what is evil, good.
- C.S. Lewis talked about how a slight downward slope into sin if allowed to continue, will carry a person to the depths of sinful behavior.
- The witness in our own life of sin’s constant effort to drag us down, taken together with the moral turmoil and chaos in today’s world, is clear evidence that the wrath of God is real and active today.

15. **What is Next:** Romans 2:6-11.