

## Romans 1:18-32

### ***The Revelation of God's Righteousness in Wrath against the Wickedness of the Gentiles***

This outline can be divided into two:

- (a) Verses 18-23 teach *where* and *against what* God's wrath is revealed.
- (b) Verses 24-32 tell us *how* this wrath is revealed.

#### **A. Notes on the Text**

##### ***Verse 18***

The truth (namely the true knowledge of God through revelation) is submerged in wickedness (the commission of all kinds of sin, v.24ff) by the Gentiles: they smother the truth in wickedness. (See Glossary #33.)

##### ***Verse 19***

Not all, but a great deal indeed is known of God by all men, through the revelation in creation. (See Glossary #29.)

##### ***Verse 20***

Man can get an inkling of God's power and majesty when he sees other creatures.

##### ***Verses 19 and 20***

Here we have one of the most difficult parts of the letter to the Romans. "Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them" (v.19). God is showing the Gentiles something. That is clear. Paul does not speak of something innate in Gentiles or all men, but of an act of revelation by God. How does this take place? We read about it in v.20. God reveals his eternal power and deity in all creation. So God occupies himself with man through his works. Man has the opportunity and responsibility to respond to that. That is what Paul means by "understood."

To understand [or perceive, RSV] is the ability of man to know, and at the same time it is man's deepest consciousness, as he stands in relationship to God and as he shows this in his way of life. "Perception," is, thus, the window by which God's revelation enters and by which man is addressed in his responsibility. (H.N. Ridderbos)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ed. Note: Quote is from the *Chr. Encyclopedie*, vol.5, 2nd printing.

Thus the eternal power and deity address man in his responsibility. Therefore the Gentiles have no excuse.<sup>2</sup> (See Glossary #17.)

### **Verses 21ff.**

As a result of the fall into sin, man became foolish. Even today it is characteristic of apostasy to attempt to depict the Creator in visible images. Deuteronomy 4:12,15ff. and Isaiah 40, especially vv.18ff. speak against this practice. Here the sin against the second commandment is a result of the sin against the first commandment (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 34 and 35). The reverse is also possible: from image worship (iconolatry; compare Jeroboam I in 1 Kings 13) to idolatry (Ahab in 1 Kings 16:29ff.). Self-willed religion, such as mysticism, loses the God of the Scriptures.

### **Verses 24ff.**

These speak about "unnatural" sins as a result of rejecting the Lord. Religion is the basis of morals and morality. When the Lord's service is abandoned, sins against all of God's commandments can take place.

Note that it says three times that God "gave them over" to those sins (vv. 24,26,28). That means: God punishes sin with (giving up to new and more) sin. That is God's temporal judgment (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, A. 10) over sin. (See also Revelation 22:11, for example.) Lists of sins are also to be found in Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 5:10ff.; 6:9ff.; 2 Corinthians 12:20ff.; Galatians 5:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:2-5. As you compare these lists, note that there is no fixed order and no fixed list.

It is noteworthy that Paul does not say that all Gentiles are guilty of all sins. There were "decent" Gentiles then, just as there are "decent" unbelievers now. If one looks at the excesses of sin, one must say: the world is terrible! Looking at the "decent" people in the world one might say: the world is not such a bad place!

Paul wrote this letter from Corinth, a Greek sea port. He saw people there living like animals. At that time "living like a Corinthian" was proverbial for living a life of debauchery.

## **B. Main Thoughts**

1. The main thoughts have already been stated: only in the gospel can we find the revelation of God's saving justice. Outside of it there is God's punishing justice over all sins committed by man. We, as Christian believers, are still concerned with this punishing judgment of God. (See Heidelberg Catechism, A. 60 [still inclined to all evil], 114, 115, 126; Canons of Dort, V, 1ff. [which speaks about admonition and comfort regarding remaining sins and weaknesses]).

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<sup>2</sup> Ed. Note: cf. W.H. Velema, *Verkenningen in Romeinen* (1962).

2. In vv. 24ff. there is a literal, and thus clear, condemnation of homosexuality and homophilia. It is estimated that about five percent of the population is homosexual. Unfortunately, tolerance toward this evil is on the increase in Christian circles, so that many consider homosexuality the equivalent of heterosexuality.

God's Word, however, teaches us differently! (See, besides Romans 1, also Leviticus 18:22.) When people forsake the Lord, such sins, as well as pedophilia (sexual practices with children) and bestiality (with animals) become more and more commonplace.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Ed, Note:* See W.G. deVries *Marriage in Honour*, (Paideia/Premier Press, 1980) p. 57ff. on homosexuality.