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Romans

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,
Romans 1:18

Paul now introduces the “wrath of God.” The word wrath is from the Greek orge, which in turn comes from orago. This word means to “teem” or to “swell.” Hence, this isn’t just a rash or sudden breaking out of wrath, but God’s measured and righteous indignation at the state of man which Paul will describe in detail.

However, before going forward, one needs to look back. The connector “for” tells us that Paul is basing his statement on what he just said. In verse 16, he spoke of the gospel message which is God’s means of salvation and that it is based on belief. In verse 17, he says “for in it, the righteousness of God is revealed.” In other words, the gospel which necessitated the torturous death of the Lord Jesus reveals the righteousness of God.

Jesus’ death wasn’t an isolated event which only applies to a group known as Christians and no one else. It resulted because of “who” God is, His very nature, and thus it applies to every human on earth. The wrath of God will be executed in all people – either directly as a result of their own unrighteousness, or indirectly by substitution. The substitution still deals with the individual’s unrighteousness, but it was taken out in Jesus and it is “revealed from faith to faith.” Therefore,

“The just shall live by faith.” The faith includes the fact that God has dealt with their sin in the body of Jesus Christ.

Now we can understand “the wrath of God” which Paul introduces in today’s verse. This wrath “is revealed from heaven” meaning that it comes directly from the throne of God and therefore it stems from His very character. There is nothing arbitrary or impetuous about it. Instead, when it is seen, it is because a violation against His nature has occurred. It is this measured and righteous response which comes against “all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.”

The two words are translated from asebeia and adikia. The first is well translated as “ungodliness” because it reflects the opposite of godliness. What is demonstrated is the polar opposite of what is expected. An example of this would be homosexuality. Sex was designed by God to be between a man and a woman. This is the self-evident natural order of things. Therefore, sins such as this are committed against what God has naturally instilled in us and they are diametrically opposed to His very nature; it is ungodliness. The second word deals more with an absence of what is inwardly right in attitude and what is outwardly right in conduct. It is the intention behind the act leading to the act – “I don’t care what God says and instead I will do this.” This is “unrighteousness.”

God’s wrath is revealed in these things by those “who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” What this is saying is tied into the two words just looked at. What is natural and correct is instilled in humanity by God and thus we have a conscience about our actions. But this conscience is suppressed in order for us to do those things which are contrary to the conscience. As Paul will show us, this leads to a spiral of depravity which goes from one sin to another – each more depraved than the next.

This unnatural course isn’t taken by individuals alone though. Instead it is the path of societies throughout history as well. Examples of such depravity are given from the earliest pages of the Bible and are seen to continue to its last pages. We need to be clear on what Paul is telling us because this is what necessitated the

death of the Lord. Looking to His cross is the only way apart from God's wrath being directly unleashed on us for the spiral to be stopped.

For an individual, accepting the gospel leads to salvation. In a nation, it leads to the restoration of morality and a right societal relationship with God. Unfortunately, as wickedness grows, the numbers of those who will accept the message dwindle until God's wrath is revealed, not in Christ's substitution, but in His measured response of destruction.

An important point to consider while reviewing Paul's words in this verse is that a full explanation of the good news is coming. However, before the felicity and favor we must see the enmity and wrath. Only then can we understand the great love of God which is found in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Life application: One sin caused man to fall and all were condemned through that one sin. God has offered a cure: through one Man's righteousness, we can be healed and saved. Are you willing to put aside your enmity with God and accept His kind offer of grace?