



# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## The Recipients of the Wrath of God, Part 1

In the opening chapters of the book of Romans, Paul is endeavoring to bring his readers to the conclusion he is going to be making in Romans 3:23-25. This conclusion is that:

1. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
2. Thus, if any man is to be saved from God's wrath, they must have the forgiveness of sin which only is granted in Christ.

In Romans 1-2 Paul gives himself to a detailed analysis of the wrath of God. In fact, from Romans 1:18 we've seen:

- The Nature of God's Wrath, v. 18a; it is the settled anger of a holy God which is able to be averted in Christ.
- The Expression of God's Wrath, v. 18b; it is an active, dynamic, and present reality which is and will continue to be worked out (1) in this age, (2) at the last judgment, and (3) in the age to come.
- The Objects of God's Wrath, v. 18c; it is set not against sinful actions per se, but directed against the sinning individual!
- The Cause of God's Wrath, v. 18d;
  - Mankind stands before God and yet refuses to give Him the honor and glory that is His

- due. Instead, they run headlong into sin and rebellion.
- o As a result, the sinful inclination of every man is to hold back the truth about God through unrighteous living! The more immoral and ungodly a person becomes the more he frees himself from God! It is on account of this rebellion that judgment will come.

This was Paul's introduction. Now, we will focus upon the recipients of God's wrath. We learn that there are only two groups of people who are under God's wrath: the non-religious and the religious.

Romans 1:18-23, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.<sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools,<sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things."<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes the evidence against a criminal is so overwhelming that a conviction is guaranteed. For example in a police lineup in Los Angeles, detectives asked each man in the lineup to repeat the words, "Give me all your money or I'll shoot." The suspected robber standing in the lineup shouted, "That's not what I said!"

And then there was a man wanting to rob a Bank of America in downtown San Francisco walked into the bank and wrote on a deposit slip, "This iz a stikkup. Put all your muny in this bag." While standing in line waiting to give his note to the teller, he began to worry that someone had seen him write the note and might call the police before he reached the window. So he left the Bank of America and crossed the street to a Wells Fargo Bank. After waiting a few minutes in line he handed his note to the Wells Fargo teller. She read it and, surmising from the numerous spelling errors that he was not very bright, told him that she could not accept his stickup note because it was written on a Bank of America deposit slip and that he would either have to fill out a Wells Fargo deposit slip or go back to Bank of America. Looking somewhat defeated, the man said "OK" and left. The Wells Fargo teller then called the police who arrested the man a few minutes later as he was waiting in line back at Bank of America!!

With each of these crimes, a conviction wasn't very long in coming because there simply was so much evidence that testified to the criminal's guilt. And you know what, on the last day when we stand before the Highest Judge, God Himself, there will be no excuse for any not knowing and serving God. Why? Because the evidence testifying to the existence of God and the creature's call to serve Him is so overwhelming. And thus, all without Christ, all who refuse to worship and serve the Lord will stand silent and guilty before God.

## The Fact of Revelation

Let us look at the basis for God's wrath against the non-religious. It revolves around the revelation which God has placed about Himself in creation! Notice the fact of revelation.

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<sup>1</sup> The Holy Bible : English standard version. 2001. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Romans 1:18-19a, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is KNOWN about God..."

This a verbal adjective, *known*, indicates "that which is knowable." Thus, it is not that everything there is to know about God is "evident" in creation. Rather, that which is capable of being known about God apart from a special act of revelation on the part of God, God's word is evident. Literally this means that it is open to sight, visible, manifest. The root comes from the Greek φαν, which refers to "shining." To be evident is to be out in the open, shining, revealing its true character. Thus we could read this as that which is able to be known about God is "shining in their midst."

God makes this evident to mankind. This too is an amazing statement! It is not that men, acting on their own initiative, discover God. Rather, God reveals the truth of Himself to every man. It is as though that which is knowable about God apart from God's word is as the sun shining forth in great radiance. And God in His omnipotence actively shines the truth about God into the eyes of every man.

And thus, no person can plead ignorance when it comes to the existence of God. For even without the Bible, every man has ALWAYS received and CONTINUES to receive God's revelation of Himself. Paul preaching in Lystra said this:

Acts 14:16-17, "And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

Housed in creation is a witness concerning God. The Lord testifies to Himself in His sweet providences, the rains from heaven, the fruitful seasons, and the satisfaction He gives in food and celebration. Truly, there is no excuse for any man not serving the Lord! John speaks of Christ as this:

John 1:9, "...the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man."

This is NOT referencing the saving knowledge of God which is imparted through regeneration. Rather, this is the knowledge of the existence of God for which every man is accountable. Because of this, Paul could say referencing God:

Acts 17:27b, "He is not far from each one of us."

Thus we see the fact of revelation. God daily and at every moment shines that which is knowable about Himself from creation into the eyes of every person. And that is why all men, even though they may not have God's word, can be justly punished: God has revealed Himself to all!

## The Act of Revelation

Now the question we naturally ask at this point is, "How has God revealed Himself to man?" And that bring us to the act of revelation.

Romans 1:20, "for since the creation of the world His invisible attributes."

God's invisible attributes are His un-seeable qualities! That is, those qualities about God which are unable to be seen by the physical eye. And what are they? His..

- Eternal power: ἀῖδιος αὐτοῦ δύναμις; lit. His “ever-enduring power;” His “never-failing omnipotence.” This has reference to the attribute of God’s omnipotent power which brought all things into being and sustains all things.
- Divine nature: θειότης; this a term which summarizes the other attributes which constitute Divinity: the fact that God is.

Now according to our passage, these qualities are “invisible” for they cannot be perceived by the physical senses. And yet, Paul says that they have been clearly seen. The testimony about God from creation is so obvious and overwhelming no man can miss it! Alright, so how can God’s attributes be invisible to the eye and yet visible to the individual? Notice the next phrase.

These attributes are being understood through what has been made. Literally these attributes are “perceived with the mind through what has been made.” This refers to inner perception. While the physical eye is not able to see the “invisible things [concerning the Lord]” however the inner mind of man- his soul- is able to comprehend the invisible, and so beholds the reality of God!

Now what is the medium through which God reveals Himself? Notice the phrase, through what has been made. This refers to the created things which are observable to our senses. The things that God has made testify to our souls that God is, that He is almighty, and that He is worthy of all honor and devotion! That’s the idea here. The wonder, beauty, and glory of creation testify to a wonderful, awesome, and glorious Creator. Truly it is as we read in the Scripture.

Psalm 19:1-2, “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.”

Asaph wrote this:

Psalms 50:6; “...the heavens declare His righteousness...”

David added this:

Psalms 8:1, “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Thy name in all the earth, who has displayed Thy splendor above the heavens!”

Thus God, speaking through Isaiah, said this:

Isaiah 40:26, “Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created the stars...”

And so while God is invisible and therefore cannot be seen, nevertheless God has left the imprints of His glory upon creation, and this glory is manifest to all- “...for God made it evident to them!” Thus, The ACT of Revelation is that God’s creation actively testifies to our soul that God is, that He is almighty, and that He is worthy of our praise and devotion!

## Revelation's Result

The result of revelation is that they are without excuse. Indeed, a man may plead that...

- He is ignorant.
- Because he has never heard or read God's Word it would be unjust for him to receive God's wrath.
- No one ever told him.

And yet Paul's point is that all of these excuses are but a smokescreen! Through His creation, God shines forth into the mind's-eye of every man the testimony that He is, that He is almighty, and that He is worthy to be praised. And those who miss this do so NOT because our world is so tarnished that God's glory is hard to see BUT because their heart and soul are so dark that they REFUSE to see! Don't miss it-when the heart is dark, refusal to believe follows. Christ said:

John 6:36, "But I said to you, that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe."

John 15:24a, "...but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well."

It is not a matter of whether the individual can behold the testimony of God; all can. It is what they do with this testimony. Throughout Scripture the non-believer is described as one who hates God. And so rather than accepting the testimony, they deny it. Christ said:

Luke 11:34, "The lamp of your body is your eye; when your eye is clear your whole body also is full of light but when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness."

Accordingly, fallen man in the face of the testimony of God refuses it. Truly, all are without excuse! Now this brings us to ourselves and the question: "Where are You?"

There are generally three responses you can have to the truth of this text. The first is that in response to the shining glare of God's glory which creation produces, you can shut your eyes: This as we have said is the non-Christian. The consistent picture in Scripture of the non-Christian is that he is one who has loved the darkness more than the light and therefore opposes the light.

John 3:19, "And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil."

In view of this, we gain keen insight into the worldview of the atheist and agnostic. In Scripture, there are only those who receive the light and those who refuse it! Thus the atheist or the agnostic, far from being the position...

- Of the enlightened.
- Which maintains intellectual integrity.
- Of one who honestly is seeking and just doesn't have enough to be convinced.

Rather is the position of utmost darkness and rebellion! The atheist doesn't believe in God because they have chosen actively to suppress the knowledge of Him. If you should be one who refuses to worship

the true God and devote your life to Him, it is NOT because there is not enough proof for you to conclude that God is and is therefore worthy of your praise RATHER, it is because you have shut your eyes and turned your back against the overwhelming testimony of God!

Accordingly I appeal to you your willful ignorance and rebellion are storing up wrath for you in the day of wrath and revelation! Speaking to those who have rejected God Paul wrote this:

Romans 2:4-6, "...do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds."

Accordingly, Isaiah gave this call to those in his day who refused to believe.

Isaiah 55:5-6, "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

Truly, God will by no means cast out the soul which sincerely seeks Him. Thus I encourage you to forsake your sinful ways and be healed. Forsake your evil thoughts which rebel against God! And go to God, to Christ and ask for His healing.

The second response to the shining glare of God's glory which creation produces is that you can wear sun-glasses. This is the Christian who has been so influenced by the world that they fail to see God's glory.

Many Christians (if not every Christian at some point in their lives) struggle here. We have been saved from the kingdom of Satan and his dominion and hold over our lives. And yet...

- We have been educated in a system whose very tenants oppose the truth of our passage.
- We live in a world in which Satan, the father of lies, is the prince and the power of the air.
- We have been taught to believe many of the lies Satan has propounded.

And so when it comes to looking at our world, rather than "destroying the high places raised up against the knowledge of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5), we can be found endorsing many of the views. That is why the Bible stresses over and over again the importance of allowing God's word to shape our thinking.

Romans 12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

Ephesians 4:22-23, "...in reference to your former manner of life ...lay aside the old self... and be renewed in the spirit of your mind."

The exhortation for all Christians is to exchange the sun-glasses of this world that is, the high places and lofty things raised up against Christ- with the bifocals of God's word which enables us to see God's glory! Thus Paul prayed concerning the body of Christ- people who already believed:

Ephesians 1:18, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened..."

Colossians 1:9, "For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding..."

Oh Christian, may each and every one of us have a healthy suspicion of ourselves such that we constantly subject our thinking, motives, and desires to the word of God. That was the longing and cry of the Reformation-, that we be Reformed/Biblical and yet always Reforming!

The Third response to the shining glare of God's glory which creation produces is that you can bask in its light! Toward that end, I invite you to consider with me the glory of God in creation.

- There are some birds which are able to navigate by the stars. Even if hatched and raised in a windowless building, if they are shown an artificial sky they immediately are able to orient themselves to the proper place to which to migrate.
- The Archerfish is able to fire drops of water with amazing force and accuracy, knocking insects out of the air.
- The Bombardier Beetle separately produces 2 different chemicals, which, when released and combined, explode in the face of an enemy. Yet the explosion never occurs prematurely and never harms the beetle.
- At any given time there is an average of 1,800 storms in operation in the world. The energy needed to generate these storms amounts to 1.3 trillion horsepower. Just one of these storms, producing a rain of four inches over an area of ten thousand miles, would require energy equivalent to the burning of 640 billion tons of coal to evaporate enough water for such a rain. And to cool those vapors and collect them in clouds would take another 800 billion horsepower of refrigeration working night and day for a hundred days. Again, that is just in one storm!
- Agricultural studies have determined that the average farmer in Minnesota gets 407,510 gallons of rainwater per acre per year. The State of Missouri has some 70,000 sq. miles of rain a year, an average of 38 inches. This is equal to a lake 250 miles long, 60 miles wide, and 22 feet deep. God created and sustains all of this by the word of His power!
- Did you know that there are about 5 billion birds in the US, among which some species are able to fly 500 miles non-stop across the Gulf of Mexico?
- Mallard ducks can fly 60 miles/hour.
- Eagles can fly 100 miles/hour.
- Falcons can dive at speeds of 217 miles/hour.
- In fact, the Guinness Book of World Records describes a bird which once it leaves its nest, remains in continuous flight for 3-4 years before it returns to its breeding ground. All of this is amazing. Man looks at a watch and says, "Who made this?" Look at creation and do the same!
- Did you know that the earth is 25,000 miles in circumference, weighs 6 septillion, 588 sextillion tons, and hangs unsupported in space? It spins at 1,000 miles/hour with absolute precision. It goes through space at 1,000 miles/minute in an orbit of 580 million miles long.
- The head of a comet may be from 10,000 to 1 billion miles long, having a tail 100 trillion miles long, and travel at a speed of 350 miles/second.
- Did you know that if the sun's radiated energy could be converted into usable energy, it would be the equivalent of 500 million, million, billion horsepower? Each second it consumes about 4

million tons of matter.

- Consider the human heart. It is about the size of its owner's fist, and yet in the average individual it does enough work in 12 hours to lift 65 tons one inch off the ground.
- Did you know that a water molecule is composed of only three atoms? Yet if all the molecules in one drop of water were the size of a grain of sand, they could be made into a road one foot thick and 1/2 mile wide that would stretch from Los Angeles to New York.

Isn't all of this wonderful? What a wonderful God. In the words of David:

Psalms 8:1, 3-4, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Thy name in all the earth, who hast displayed Thy splendor above the heavens!... When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him?"

May God give us the grace to heed the call of creation and so worship!

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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### **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on February 14, 2010. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.