

ROMANS IV

The Glory of the Obvious

Romans I:18-25

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INTRODUCTION:

God the Father is prominent in the first three chapters of Romans. God the Son figures largely from the middle of three to the end of five. And then the Holy Spirit is central from chapters five through eight. We have the wrath of the Father, the propitiation of the Son, and the liberating deliverance of the Spirit. Remember that all three persons of the Trinity are working in harmony together, and that they are not trying to balance one another by leaning in opposite directions. So as we work through the first part of the book of Romans, let us remember that God reveals Himself in His Word, and not just in His creation.

THE TEXT:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom. I:18-25).

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

In this passage, Paul outlines what the wrath of God is directed against, which is all ungodliness and unrighteousness (v. 18). He also reveals to us the way God’s wrath functions (v. 24). Men in rebellion suppress the truth in unrighteousness, holding it under (v. 18). Paul is explicit that men sin against light. God has shown to man what is manifestly truth about Him. He has shown it to them and *in* them (v. 19). How did God do this? God’s invisible characteristics are understood by inference from the things that are made (v. 20). Specifically, Paul means God’s eternal power and Godhead, and this means that men are without excuse in their rejection of Him (v. 20). This is because they started from a position of knowing God (v. 21), but then refused to do two things. They refused to acknowledge the Godness of God, refusing to glorify Him as God (v. 21), and they refused to be thankful (v. 21). As a result, their imagination veered into vanity, and their foolish hearts were darkened (v. 21). Of course, this was not their perspective on what was happening (v. 22). As they became increasingly foolish, they puffed themselves up as wise. The glory of the incorruptible God that they refused to glorify was changed (in their imagination only) into images of corruptible creatures, like man, birds, quadrupeds, and creeping things (v. 23). Therefore God let them go, giving them up to uncleanness in the lusts of their hearts and the dishonoring of their bodies (v. 24). This is what happens to those who swap the truth of God for a lie (v. 25), and who worship and serve the creature more than the Creator—the one who is forever blessed (v. 25). *Amen*.

THE WRATH OF THE FATHER:

We are accustomed to think that the wrath of God comes on men for their sins. We sin in history, and the wrath of God comes at the end of history. This is certainly true (see v. 32), but it is not the *entire* truth. The Bible not only teaches that sin brings the wrath of God, but that in an important sense, sin *is* the wrath of God. In this passage, the wrath of God is revealed against sin (v. 18). But how is it revealed (v. 24)? When God “lets go” that is a form of His wrath. When He takes away His restraining hand, the pit of evil that we fall into is a consequence of His anger, and not just an occasional for additional anger later. We see the same principle elsewhere in Scripture. “The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the LORD shall fall therein” (Prov. 22:14).

This adultery is not just something that God will judge; it is a judgment in its own right. Sodom was judged, therefore, *before* the fire fell, and America is under judgment as we speak. The mercy of God is when we say to God, “Thy will be done.” The wrath of God is when He says to us, “No, no, *thy* will be done.”

SUPPRESSION, SUBSTITUTION, SUBVERSION:

The sin starts with rebellion and ingratitude. That is the first step. God takes our heads in both His hands, and points our head towards the greatness of His glory. We refuse to look because to do so would obligate us. We take the greatness of His glory and thrust it away from us, holding it under, *suppressing* it. The second stage is to *substitute* something else in place of God—images of men, or birds, or beasts, or crawling things. The final stage of judgment (remember, this is the wrath of God) is subversion. The glory of God in the image of God (man) is still too clear, and so that image must be dishonored. That dishonor takes the form of homosexual practices. This is not something where we can agree to differ. It is not that we believe such practices are dishonoring, while they believe it is honoring. They know it is dishonoring and degrading also—that is the whole *point*.

REALITY AND IMAGE:

You cannot dishonor the glory of God in the Godhead, and then sustain honor for the image of God in man. Incidentally, Godhead is not related to the word *head*, but rather from the Middle English *hed* to our word *hood*. So this word refers to the Godness of God, the Godhood of God, the divine nature of God.

This means, among other things, that apart from Christ human rights is an incoherent concept. If you hate the person, you won't honor their picture. If your whole orientation is a rejection of the goodness of God, then what are you going to do with the reflection of that goodness that is found in the human body? You are going to figure out ways to degrade it, and unnatural sex acts are one of the most obvious ways to accomplish that kind of degradation.

WHAT EVERYBODY KNOWS:

Never undertake to prove what everybody knows already. When you are in discussions with the office atheist, or with the radical secularist in your family at the Christmas reunion, do not accept their invitation to step into a neutral place from which you can prove to them that God exists. For to do so grants legitimacy to the heart of their rebellion—you have acknowledged that he really does not know, and that he would really like to know. He is holding an overinflated beach ball underwater, and has been doing it so long that his arms are quivering, and he invites you to accept the challenge of proving to *his* satisfaction that beach balls in fact do exist. He is *terribly* interested, and wants nothing more than to know the truth.

Remember that he professes that what he is doing is wise (v. 22). But God's evaluation is different (v. 22). They say they want nothing other than respect, mutual affirmation, an elimination of hate crimes, and all the rest of it. God calls it the dishonoring *of one another*.



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