**Romans**

**Lesson 2: When God Gives Us Over Romans 1:18-32**

According to Dr. John Hammett, Professor of Systematic Theology at SEBTS,

Because God is holy, He rejects all that is unholy. This opposition to and rejection of what is unholy, the Bible calls the wrath of God. **It is not uncontrolled passion, but a firm and unalterable opposition to every form of evil.** As light by its nature opposes darkness, holiness by its nature blazes against evil. The wrath of God is seen against some sins today (Romans 1:18, 24, 26, 28), but it will be openly revealed one day against all evil in a final consummation.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Most people would rather not hear about the wrath of God. They prefer to envision God as an all-loving, grandfatherly figure. While He is a God of love, the Bible makes it clear that God has many attributes, and clearly, wrath is among them. Think of it like this: God hates evil because of the destruction it causes on earth and the harm it brings to people He created and loves. Therefore, His wrath burns against evil!

**A Dark Picture of Humanity**

When God created the world, He warned man that he would die if he rebelled against Him (Genesis 2:15-17). Mankind did rebel; God was true to His Word, and death entered the world. Death is part of the outworking of God’s wrath. In fact, man’s rebellion became so widespread that eventually, God had no choice but to destroy the world, hence the Flood. Genesis 6:5-8 states:

The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, “I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them.” But one man by the name of Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

Because of God’s grace, He protected Noah and his family from the flood by instructing him to build an ark that would shield them from the outpouring of God’s wrath. The ark foreshadows what Jesus did for us by his death on the cross. The cross protects those who believe in Jesus from the wrath of God.

It is important to note that man’s rebellion affected not only human beings but also every aspect of creation. Mankind began to die, as did creation. Later in Romans, we shall see creation itself longs to be “liberated from its bondage to decay” (Romans 8:21). Thus, we see one aspect of God’s wrath—death. But there is another lesser-known aspect of God’s wrath: His abandonment of mankind to the wickedness of their sins. In other words, God gives man over to the sinful desires of his heart, as we will see in Romans chapter 1. God desires that everyone obey His laws, commands, and precepts because He knows the path of obedience leads to peace, joy, contentment, and well-being; however, God does not force anyone to obey Him. He has given every man free will. Man is free to choose—he can obey God or reject Him.

In Romans 1, we read that God has revealed Himself to the world. His existence is evident in creation. Anyone who looks up at the stars witnesses the hand of God. Another example is the divine imprint found in the human body. God has left evidence of his existence everywhere. His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen in creation. Tim Keller writes,

We all know, regardless of what we tell ourselves, that there is a Creator, on whom we are utterly dependent and to whom we are completely accountable. We cannot know everything about God from creation—his love and mercy, for instance—but we can, and do, deduce that whoever created all this must be a being of unimaginable greatness. And then we suppress that truth.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Sadly, despite great evidence of God’s existence, mankind chooses to suppress the truth.   
Though every human being knows God exists, no one glorifies Him or even pauses to give Him gratitude. Instead, people choose to live independent of God and are somehow convinced they don’t really need Him. Eventually, man’s heart becomes foolish and darkened. In that dark condition, people choose to worship creation rather than the Creator. This is the behavior of fools and deserves God’s anger.

What is God’s response? He gives us what we want. He lets us go our own way. Man willfully marches away from God in rebellion, and God’s wrath is revealed. Thus, He gives mankind over to his sinful desires. Three times in Romans 1, we see the phrase “and God gave them over.” First, as man turns away from his Creator to worship that which has been created, God gives him over to natural sin— “the degrading of their bodies with one another” (v. 24). As man travels further down this sinful path, God gives him over to unnatural sin. Natural relations are exchanged for unnatural ones as men and women are inflamed with lust for one another (v. 26). Finally, as mankind continues to rebel against God, God gives him over to a depraved mind—one that can no longer discern between good and evil (v. 28). In the end, the heart of man becomes so hardened through open and active rebellion that he actually begins to celebrate with those who practice all kinds of evil, though he knows what they do is wrong (v. 32).

The first chapter of Romans provides a sobering glimpse into the heart of man. Jeremiah 17:9 states, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”   
Keller writes,

The worst thing God can do to human beings in the present is to let them reach their idolatrous goals. His judgment is to give us over to the destructive power of idolatry, and of evil. When we sin, it sets up stresses and strains in the fabric of the order that God created. Instead of us finding blessing, our sin causes breakdowns spiritually, psychologically, socially, and physically. The great tragedy is that we choose this for ourselves. God allows us to walk through the door we have chosen.[[3]](#footnote-3)

DAY 1. Read Romans 1:18-20.

1. What is the wrath of God (v. 18)?
   1. How has God’s wrath been revealed in the past? How is it being revealed in and to the world today?
   2. Why do you think we rarely, if ever, hear anything about the wrath of God in the church today?
2. According to verse 18, of what are men guilty?
   1. How do we suppress the truth?
   2. Can you think of some examples of how the truth is suppressed in our society?
3. How has God revealed Himself to the world? (See Psalm 19:1-4)
   1. According to Romans 1:19-20, is the evidence of God clearly seen by men?
   2. Can you think of some ways God has revealed Himself to you? (See Romans 2:14-15 and Ecclesiastes 3:11)
4. Will anyone be able to stand before God one day and say, “Well, I just didn’t know about You; otherwise, I would have believed” (v. 20)?

DAY 2 . Read Romans 1:21-25 & Review the Chart, “The Downward Spiral of Sin.”

1. What is man’s second step downward away from God according to verses 22-23?
   1. What happens to the heart of man as he turns away from God?
   2. Can you think of some things we turn to rather than God as sources of contentment   
      and satisfaction?
2. As man turns away from God, how does God respond? (v. 24)
   1. To what do men turn, and where does this desire originate? (v. 24)
   2. Write what you learn from the following verses:

Jeremiah 17:9

Matthew 5:28

Luke 6:45

James 1:14-15

1. In verse 23, man exchanges the Creator for the created. What is the third downward step in man’s rebellious march away from God? (v. 25)

DAY 3 . Read Romans 1:26-32.

1. Does God force man to turn back to Him?
   1. What does He do, again, according to verse 26?
2. What are the three words God uses to describe homosexuality in vv. 26-27?   
   What do these words mean to you?

A word from Tim Keller on the issue of homosexuality:

While homosexuality is a sin, it is a sin—not the worst sin. All sexual sin is sinful   
(Romans 1:24); and Paul is about to list other sins in verses 29-31, which he calls “wickedness”—acts which issue from our rejection of the truth about God, and damage   
our horizontal relationships, and which deservedly bring God’s wrath (v 18).[[4]](#footnote-4)

1. Read Genesis 2:24-25. According to this passage, what has always been God’s perfect   
   plan for man?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-20.
   1. According to v. 11, what is the only hope for anyone who has committed sexual sin? (See also Titus 3:5-7)
   2. Why do you think sexual sin is particularly egregious to God?
3. Why do you think society has difficulty accepting God’s established order in   
   sexual relationships?

DAY 4. Read Romans 1:26-32.

1. Because of man’s continued rebellion, what does God do a third time according to v. 28?
   1. What is the result of man’s rebellion?
   2. What is a depraved mind?
   3. According to vv. 29-32, to what does a depraved mind lead?
2. According to v. 32
   1. What does man know, deep down inside, about his sinful practices?
   2. What does he continue to do?
3. Read Romans 3:23 and 6:23. What do you conclude from these two verses?
4. Paul begins his letter to the Romans by referring to “the gospel of God.” The Greek word for gospel is *euangelion* which means “the good news.”
   1. After reading Romans 1:18-32, 3:23, and 6:23, why is this message from God referred to as “the good news?”
   2. Why did Paul desire to tell everyone?
   3. What is your response to this “good news?”

Keller writes,

Paul’s confidence, joy and passion for the gospel rest on the assumption that all human beings are, apart from the gospel, under God’s wrath. If you don’t understand or believe in the wrath of God, the gospel will not thrill, empower or move you.[[5]](#footnote-5)

1. John Samuel Hammett, Ph.D. “Systematic Theology I” [lecture notes, SETBS, Wake Forest, NC, June, 2000], 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Keller, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)