

CLASS 2: THE GENTILES, NATURAL THEOLOGY, AND NATURAL LAW (Romans 1:18-32)

II. Mankind guilty before God, 1:18 - 3:20

Before showing the way of salvation, Paul proves the universal need for salvation. The gospel is truly for Jew and Gentile. We are lost in sin and condemned without the righteousness of God.

1. The Gentiles guilty, 1:18-32

God's wrath against the Gentiles who are idolaters is shown by his judicial hardening of their hearts. They do not even live up to the truths revealed in nature and in their consciences; they "suppress" these truths. Nature reveals the power and divinity of God, yet they construct their own gods which are weaker than themselves; thus they actually worship themselves.

Apostasy in theology brings apostasy in morals. The result of idolatry is unbridled sinfulness, including all sorts of perversions, which are self-evidently harmful as well as immoral. In spite of their knowledge of God's law, they insist on disobedience and rebellion.

Need for the Gospel – the wrath of God

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

"For" – the reason we need the Gospel, we all are under God's wrath because of our "ungodliness and unrighteousness"

How is the wrath of God being revealed? (present tense)

1. Physical consequences of sin
2. Additional hardening in sin (vv. 24, 26, 28)
3. Eschatological wrath (2:5-11)
4. Seen in Paul's day by the crucifixion of Christ (note parallel with v. 17)

"Unrighteousness" – results in "suppressing the truth"

Assumes some original knowledge (in next verses)

Note unfolding discussion of natural theology and natural law (bad theology producing bad ethics, spelled out in this chapter)

Definitions:

Natural theology –

Natural law –

Note that “revealed” is used in v. 17 for the righteousness of God and in v. 18 for the wrath of God. That is the word *apokalupso*, “to reveal what had been hidden or unknown.”

Natural theology

¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ 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.

“What can be known about God” – that is, by all humans, apart from special revelation

“Plain” and “has shown” from same Greek word (*phaneros*)

“Invisible things of (about) him” — attributes of “eternal power” and “divine nature”

- Transcendent over nature
- Other passages (wisdom, power, love):

He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD. ⁶ By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. (Ps 33:5-6)

O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. (Ps 104:24)

It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens. (Jer 10:12)

So that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matt 5:45)

“Have been clearly perceived” – All the Gentiles have understood these things

“In/By the things that are made” – the creation and God’s good providence display his attributes

“Ever since the creation of the world” – taken in a time sense – it has always been this way, from Adam’s day to our own

“Without excuse” – all mankind, including Gentiles, responsible; cannot claim ignorance

Gentile idolatry – denial of natural theology

²¹ 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. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles

“They knew God” – intuitive knowledge, reinforced through general revelation in creation and providence

“Did not honor him as God or give thanks” – sinful hearts produced different reaction, desire to change or replace God to serve themselves

“Futile” thinking – foolishness of idolatry (Isa 44:9-20)

“Foolish hearts darkened . . . became fools” – judicial hardening of their hearts by God

“Claiming to be wise” – as the idolatrous ancient Greeks (Acts 17:16-21; 1 Cor 1:18-25)

“They became fools . . . exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” – took their rejection of the true God to extreme and absurd lengths

Gentile wickedness – denial of natural law

Wicked lusts given free reign

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen

Reason: changed God’s truth for “the lie” (article is in the Greek)

- “The lie” is the worship of the creature rather than the Creator
- Sin of the Antichrist (2 Thess 2:11-12)
- Note interjection of a doxology “the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”

Result: judicial judgment continues, God “gives them up” to their desires, to “dishonor” their own bodies

Homosexual perversion

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Both female and male homosexuality

“Shameless acts” – open, no shame

“Receiving in themselves the due penalty of their error (NIV ‘perversion’)” --

- The perversion itself
- Physical injuries and diseases

Note, this not only an OT commandment

Note also, the fact that homosexuality was widely practiced in the Gentile world does not make it acceptable for the Christian; they had to change (1 Cor 6:9-11)

More harmful sins

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

“God gave them up” – additional judicial hardening

“What ought not to be done” – not only against law, but against reason

V. 28 word-play: “did not see fit” . . . “God gave them an unfit mind” (*dokimazo, adokimos*)

Vice list, longest in NT

- Three groups: 4 nouns in the dative case, 5 nouns in the genitive case, 12 items based on “them” (7 positive, 5 negative)

- Note eloquence of list; example of v. 31 (4 alpha privatives): “They are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.” (NIV)
- Crimes of violence, like Gen 6

V. 32, “They know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die” – excellent verse for natural law

- Know by conscience
- Know by observation of results
- Should know by oral tradition from creation of Adam and Eve
- Capital punishment is just

“They not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.” – they sin themselves, and encourage others to sin, thus compounding the heinousness of their sin

The spiritual state of the pagan Gentiles

Lost, under God’s wrath

No exceptions stated

If any saved, through special revelation and faith