

The Greatest Letter Ever Written

An Expository Journey Through the **Epistle of Romans**

Romans 1:18-32

6-The Wrath of God is Revealed

July 2, 2023

Romans 1:18-32

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

19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,

23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,

27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,

29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,

30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,

31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;

32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

We have just completed a comprehensive Examination of the Purpose and main Meaning of this entire Epistle: The Gospel; what the Gospel is (and is not); how God uses the Gospel to save Sinners; and the Relationship between the individual Believers and Righteousness. We also

discovered that verses 16&17 are Paul's *first* area of Theology and Doctrine after his Introduction in verses 1-15.

Now we will examine a very large area of inspired Scripture that begins in **Romans 1:18** and goes all the way down to **Romans 3:19** that will uncover how sinful Sin really is and why God had to come to this earth; live a sinless Life; die on the Cross; and rise from the Dead three days later. This Section is one of the most important Passages in the entire Bible.

In **Romans 1:18-3:18** the Apostle explains why God had to do the two things that he speaks about in **Romans 3:19**:

1. God "*closed the Mouth*" of the entire World
2. God "*brought the entire World into Accountability*" with Himself

What these two things mean; Why God did this; Why doing this was vital; and What was going on that made these two things necessary- is the Subject of the other 62 verses.

It is fascinating to learn that when it came time for the Apostle to teach Doctrine and Theology (Biblical Truth)- he began by speaking about the Gospel (v. 15&16). But the very next Issue that Paul dealt with in this Masterpiece was the "*Wrath of God*". And that is what we will examine now. And I want to divide this Passage of 15 verses into four Parts:

1. Verses 18&19
2. Verses 20-24
3. Verses 25-27
4. Verses 28-32

... so, let's examine each one of these Parts together.

1. Romans 1:18&19

Paul began by saying,

Romans 1:18&19

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

... and this Passage calls us to examine several Questions:

1. What is the "Wrath of God"?
2. How is God's Wrath "against" ALL ungodliness and ALL Unrighteousness?
3. How do men "suppress the Truth" in Unrighteousness?
4. What does verse 19 teach?

1. What is the Wrath of God?

The Bible teaches clearly and repeatedly that God demonstrates His Wrath toward the people He calls, “Ungodly” and “Unrighteous”. But while God *demonstrates* His Wrath- God is NOT Wrath. In other words, Wrath is NOT a part of Who God is. So, Wrath is NOT a Characteristic or an Attribute of God. The Bible says that God is Love.

1John 4:7-21

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

12 No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

13 By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

14 We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

16 We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

17 By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

19 We love, because He first loved us.

20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

21 And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

This Passage teaches that God loves His people and just how wonderful the Love of God really is. But verse 8 says something different. This verse says that God *IS* Love. And that means that Love is part of Who God is. So, in addition to loving His people- God Himself *IS* Love.

And as we ponder that- we then need to understand that the Bible teaches that God is many things (Omniscient; Omnipotent; Omnipresent, etc.)- but the Bible does NOT teach that God is Wrath. Wrath is NOT part of God’s Character and Nature. And yet, right here in **Romans 1:18**- we read:

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

So, what is God's "Wrath"? The word that was translated into English as "Wrath" came from a Greek word (*orge*; Strong's #3709), which means: *Anger as a State of Mind; Indignation; and Desire- with great Grief*. And there are other words in the Bible that will help us to understand what God's Wrath is like:

- **Indignation** (31 times) from "*orge*"
- **Retribution** (4 times) from "*orge*"
- **Anger** (*iae* Hebrew) "*nose anger*"- *the flaring of nostrils*
- **Vengeance** (*ekdikasis*; Strong's #1557) *the execution of Justice*

Now we live in a day where we have set ourselves as the Judge and we have put God's Character on trial. And so, we ask Questions like, "*How can Hell be Just?*" "*Why would God command the Israelites to destroy the Canaanites?*" "*Why does God always seem so Angry?*" and "*How can a loving God throw people into Hell?*"

The fact that so many people struggle with these Questions, and many more just like them, shows us that, more than ever, "*Right Thinking*" and "*Right Believing*" is needed about the Doctrine of God's Wrath. And it is needed for three Things:

1. As a Motivation for godly Living
2. As a Fuel for proper Worship
3. As a Source from which we may confront Objections to Christianity

... so, in light of that- let's look at five biblical Truths about the Wrath of God:

A. God's Wrath is Just.

It has become common for many to argue that the God of the Old Testament is a "moral Monster"- who is simply not worthy or deserving of our Worship. But this simply illustrates how far some have fallen since God used people to write down His Word. Because the biblical writers had no such Thoughts; and they didn't come to that Conclusion. In fact, to them- God's Wrath was said to be in perfect Accord with His Justice. For example, the Apostle Paul wrote this in **Romans 2:1-11**:

- 1 Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things** [those things that Paul identified in the previous Chapter].
- 2 And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.**
- 3 But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?**
- 4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?**
- 5 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,**
- 6 who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS:**
- 7 to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;**

8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

9 There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek,

10 but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

11 For there is no partiality with God.

... so, to Paul- God's Wrath was in perfect Proportion to human Sinfulness.

Similarly, **Proverbs 24:12** says,

If you say, "See, we did not know this," Does He not consider it who weighs the hearts? And does He not know it who keeps your soul? And will He not render to man according to his work?

J.I. Packer summarized:

“God’s wrath in the Bible is never the capricious, self-indulgent, irritable, morally ignoble thing that human anger so often is. It is, instead, a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil”¹

... and that makes God's Wrath to be Correct and Right- even a Way that God receives Glory!

I have long ago tried to teach people that as bond-slaves of the Lord Christ, who say we believe the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of the living God- we not only need to agree that Hell exists- but we need to go further and say that Hell is Right; it is Correct; and those who refuse to repent and trust in Jesus deserve to go to Hell forever.

The kicker is that we deserve to go to Hell, too. Every human on earth- Saved or Lost- has sinned enough to have earned a place in Hell- a thousand times over. So, we must understand that NOBODY deserves Heaven while EVERYBODY deserves Hell.

B. God's Wrath Shows that God is Serious about Sin

The horrific Death of the Son of God on the Cross- as He screamed in Agony and the Damnation of unrepentant human beings are the loudest Shouts under Heaven that God is infinitely Holy; Sin is infinitely Offensive; Wrath is infinitely Just; and Grace is infinitely Precious.

When Jesus was on the Cross- He didn't simply die- even though that would have been terrible enough. He also did much MORE than die an *excruciating* Death- even though it was horrific. God *adjudicated* the “*Sin Debt*” on Jesus that we incurred by our many Sins. In other words, God poured out the full Fury of His Wrath against every Sin on Jesus- while He was on the Cross. And this shows how serious God was (and is) about Sin- because God the father loves God the Son MORE than He loves anything or anyone else. And for God to crush what He loved the MOST- in order to pay for our Sins- shows how serious He really was (and is).

Isaiah 53:10a

¹ JI Packer; *Knowing God*; pg. 151

But the Lord was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering...

C. God's Wrath is to be Feared.

God's Wrath is to be feared because all have sinned and have *"trampled God's Glory under-foot with disgust"*

Romans 3:23

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

God's Wrath is also to be feared because we are justly condemned Sinners apart from Christ.

Romans 5:1

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

God's Wrath is to be feared because He is powerful enough to do what He promises

Jeremiah 32:17

'Ah Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You,

Deuteronomy 32:39-42

39 'See now that I, I am He, And there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, And there is no one who can deliver from My hand.

40 'Indeed, I lift up My hand to heaven, And say, as I live forever,

41 If I sharpen My flashing sword, And My hand takes hold on justice, I will render vengeance on My adversaries, And I will repay those who hate Me.

42 'I will make My arrows drunk with blood, And My sword will devour flesh, With the blood of the slain and the captives, From the long-haired leaders of the enemy.'

And God's Wrath is to be feared because God promises eternal Punishment apart from Salvation in Jesus Christ

Matthew 25:41-46

41 "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

42 for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink;

43 I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.'

44 "Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?'

45 "Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'

46 "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

The Revelation 20:12-15

12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.

14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

C. God's Wrath is Consistent in Both the Old and New Testaments.

It is common to think of the Old Testament God as mean, harsh, and wrath-filled; and the God of the New Testament as kind, patient, and loving. Neither of these Portraits are representative of Scripture's Teaching on God or His Wrath.

We find immensely fearful Descriptions of the Wrath of God in both the Old and the New Testament. Here are just a few examples:

Jeremiah 30:23&24

23 Behold, the tempest of the Lord! Wrath has gone forth, A sweeping tempest; It will burst on the head of the wicked.

24 The fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back Until He has performed and until He has accomplished The intent of His heart; In the latter days you will understand this.

Nahum 1:2-15

2 A jealous and avenging God is the Lord; The Lord is avenging and wrathful. The Lord takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies.

3 The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, And the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. In whirlwind and storm is His way, And clouds are the dust beneath His feet.

4 He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; He dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither; The blossoms of Lebanon wither.

5 Mountains quake because of Him And the hills dissolve; Indeed the earth is upheaved by His presence, The world and all the inhabitants in it.

6 Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire And the rocks are broken up by Him.

7 The Lord is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble, And He knows those who take refuge in Him.

8 But with an overflowing flood He will make a complete end of its site, And will pursue His enemies into darkness.

9 Whatever you devise against the Lord, He will make a complete end of it. Distress

will not rise up twice.

10 Like tangled thorns, And like those who are drunken with their drink, They are consumed As stubble completely withered.

11 From you has gone forth One who plotted evil against the Lord, A wicked counselor.

12 Thus says the Lord, "Though they are at full strength and likewise many, Even so, they will be cut off and pass away. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no longer.

13 "So now, I will break his yoke bar from upon you, And I will tear off your shackles."

14 The Lord has issued a command concerning you: "Your name will no longer be perpetuated. I will cut off idol and image From the house of your gods. I will prepare your grave, For you are contemptible."

15 Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news, Who announces peace! Celebrate your feasts, O Judah; Pay your vows. For never again will the wicked one pass through you; He is cut off completely.

The Revelation 14:17-20

17 And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle.

18 Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe."

19 So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God.

20 And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.

D. God's Wrath *is* His Love in Action against Sin

WHEREAS:

- God is Love, and God does all things for His Glory (**1John 4:8; Romans 4:8; 11:36**).
- God loves His Glory above all
- God rules the world in such a way that brings Himself maximum Glory

THEREFORE:

- God **MUST** act Justly and judge all Sin by responding with Wrath!

... otherwise God would not be God.

If God did not judge all Sin- He would be agreeing with Sinners that His Glory was not worth defending. So, underneath it all- it is God's Love for His own Glory that motivates/produces/manifests His Wrath against Sin!

It is true that God's Love for His own Glory is a very sobering Reality. But even though God's Love for His own Glory thrills the soul of the Redeemed- it is NOT "*good* News" at all for unrepentant Sinners. In fact- it is the "*worst* News" they could ever get! And that is why **Hebrews 10:31** says:

It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

E. God's Wrath Defends God's Glory

When we sin- we insult God's Glory. When we turn to Sin; or to things that have been made and are passing away for Comfort and Hope and Joy- we are testifying that God and His Glory aren't enough for us. When we embrace Sin; or when we run away from God; or even when we seek for Safety and Security in what our own Strength can give us- we are rejecting God and His Glory. And there really isn't any way we could belittle God anymore than that.

So, our Sin insults God's Glory- it rejects God; and says that the only way we can be Happy and Satisfied and Content and Fulfilled- is by turning AWAY from God. But what makes that so terrible- is that God is not only the most powerful Being in the Universe- He is also the most- lovely; and the most beautiful; and the most important; and the most rewarding; and the most satisfying Being that could ever be. So, Sin against God and His Glory is a contradiction of the highest Order. It is ridiculous and absurd on a fundamental level- because NOTHING is as Good or Better than God!

So, when we rebel against God- we trample under our feet with disgust the very thing that God loves the MOST- His Glory! And so, God must defend what has been attacked. He must satisfy the "*Debt of Sin*" that has occurred by us rebelling against Him. And He does that by judging the Sin in the Fury of His Wrath and the Sinner- unless he repents.

F. The Knowledge of God's Wrath Encourages Saved People to Modify Their Behavior

Part of what it means to be "Lost"- is that they do NOT fear God.

Romans 3:9-19

9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

10 as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

13 "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS";

14 "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS";

15 "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,

16 DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,

17 AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN."

18 "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."

19 Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God;

... so, the "*Fear of God*" is best understood- NOT as being scared to death of God- but as a "*Reverential Respect*" of God.

But the "Saved" DO fear God. And they fear Hell; and they fear Judgement. So, the irony of this is that the ONLY people who fear God and eternal Damnation are the ones who will never be judged by God! Because the Saved love God- they want NO part of His Judgment. They

ONLY seek His Approval of ALL they do! And so, this “Reverential Respect” for God and His Wrath *empowers* the Saved to modify their Behavior.

F. God’s Wrath is Satisfied in Jesus Christ.

But even though all of this is true- in the very Center of God’s Wrath- we find the ultimate Good News:

1 Timothy 1:15

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.

Romans 3:24-26

24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

We rejoice that God has done what we could not do! And He alone has done what we didn’t deserve! Charles Wesley rightly exulted in this Good News when he wrote the Hymn that says:

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour’s blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain!
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

What Happens When We Sin?

When a lost person sins against God- he has “trampled under- foot with disgust”- the Glory of God.

Romans 3:23

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

The phrase here in English, “fall short” comes from a Greek word (*hustereo*; Strong’s # 5302) which means: *to be behind; to lack; to be inferior; or to come late*. But in other Greek literature that was published and read back in the 1st Century- this term had the idea of: *being so disgusted with something that a person would trample it under his feet- with great disgust*.

So, when we sin- we not only lack the Glory of God; we not only are inferior to God’s Glory- but we despise it. We walk on it- with disgust as though God’s Glory deserves no Honor or Respect!

Now when you realize that God loves His Glory MORE than anything else- our Sin is very horrible indeed. Because when lost people sin against God- they are ignoring and belittling and dishonoring what God loves the MOST!

So, how should God respond to that blatant Act of Disrespect? Should God simply ignore it? Should God simply chalk it up to “boys will be boys”? When you read the Bible- you see how God understands His Own Glory. For example,

Isaiah 42:8

I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images.

Isaiah 43:6&7

6 “I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ And to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’ Bring My sons from afar And My daughters from the ends of the earth,

7 Everyone who is called by My name, And whom I have created for My glory, Whom I have formed, even whom I have made.”

Isaiah 48:11

For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.

... and this is why God said,

Exodus 20:7

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.

Exodus 34:12-17

12 “Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst.

13 “But rather, you are to tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and cut down their Asherim

14 —for you shall not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God—

15 otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice,

16 and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons also to play the harlot with their gods.

17 “You shall make for yourself no molten gods.