

## A WORLD WITHOUT FAITH

Romans 1:18-2:16

Key Verse: 1:18

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the [truth](#) by their wickedness..."

In 1:17 Paul declared that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. God, in his righteousness, should have condemned men. But he did not do so. Rather, God condemned his one and only Son on the cross. Thus God satisfied his own righteousness. Also, he justified us to be called his righteous children, even though we are not righteous at all. But in 1:18-32 Paul declares that the wrath of God is being revealed against those who suppress the truth of God intentionally. Paul also declares that the wrath of God is being revealed against the Jews who show contempt for the long-suffering patience of God. In a word, those who do not have faith in Jesus are all wicked, and they cannot escape the wrath of God.

### I. People in the world deliberately reject God (1:18-21)

Look at verse 18. "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness...." This verse tells us that godless and wicked people "deliberately" suppress the truth of God. As a result they are piling up the wrath of God on their heads. They are escape artists. But they cannot escape the wrath of God. How do they suppress the truth of God?

First, they know God, but they deliberately reject God. Look at verse 19. "...since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them." God gave man innate knowledge through which he can know God. For example, a baby knows [how to](#) suck his mother's breast as soon as he is born. A sheep knows nothing. He is dumb. But he knows one thing--his shepherd's voice. (Jn 10:4) Likewise, man was given an innate knowledge of God so that every man can know God. If anyone says, "I don't know God because I have never learned of God," he is deliberately suppressing the truth of God. He is arrogant and corrupted. (Ps 14:1) He is like a stupid boy who covers his eyes with his fingers and says, "There is no sky."

Man also can see God through the mystery of nature. Look at verse 20. "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." Look at the fields! Fields produce crops endlessly. The sea produces fish endlessly. Trees bear fruit endlessly. Nature has fed man during the last several thousand years; it will feed man forever. When we see the mystery of nature and divine power, we cannot deny the Creator God. When we see the order and harmony of nature, or the perfect movement of time and space we cannot deny the Creator God. Think about the four seasons. In the spring, [flowers](#) bloom. In the summer, trees adorn themselves in lush and green foliage. In the autumn, the leaves change colors beautifully. In the winter, snow falls quietly and covers the ground with a clean,

white robe. Who created all these mysteries? We only stand in awe at the beauty of nature and divine power in it, and praise the Creator. So, "men are without excuse." (20)

Second, they received everything from God, but they do not thank God. Look at verse 21. "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." God is the Creator. Men are his creation, created for his own glory. Not only that, God gave his own life to each man as a gift. (Jn 1:4) God also gave men the privilege of enjoying his world as his stewards. So men should glorify God and thank God. But they neither live for the glory of God, nor thank him for all his love and blessings. Rather they want to leave God out of their lives. They want to be their own men. The parable of the tenants in Luke 20 explains this very well. The owner planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. (Lk 20:9,10) The tenants rejected the owner because they wanted the ownership of the vineyard. Likewise, when men neither honor God as God nor thank God for his love and blessing, they become as evil as the devil. One young man honored God and thanked God when he wanted to obtain God's grace and blessings. But after receiving God's grace and blessings he became as arrogant as Nebuchadnezzar, who said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built?" (Dan 4:30a) He also rejected God and his shepherd as if he had never received anything from them. In this way people become godless. We learn many things in life. But if we don't learn how to thank God, all our education is in vain. Therefore, we must learn how to thank God for his love and for his blessings. If we neither honor God as God nor thank God, our thinking becomes futile and our foolish hearts are darkened. We become godless, arrogant and overbearing. This is the reason St. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "...give thanks in all circumstances...." When we don't thank God and suppress the truth of God deliberately, we only invite the wrath of God.

## II. The results when men live without faith (1:22-32)

First, they become fools. Look at verse 22. "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools..." How do they become fools? Look at verse 23. "and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles." Here, the glory of the immortal God is God's image in man. Man was made from the dust of the ground, so he is nothing but the dust of the ground. At best he is no more than an animal man, such as a rhino or a venomous snake. But he is created in the image of God. He can be a child of God. He can also be an immortal being. In short, he can be both body and spirit. He can be superior to all other creatures. When a man has the image of God in himself, he can have God's holy desire in him, the desire to grow in his inner man to the fullness of God. But when man rejects God, he degrades himself from the spiritual dimension to the animal dimension: He loses the image of God and becomes an animal man. Even though they claim they are wise, they are fools, because when they lost the image of God, they lost everything. They think they can enjoy their wealth and human freedom permanently. But living in an ever-changing world they acknowledge that their wishes don't work as they had expected. They only become fools who work hard for nothing. They have wealth and human

freedom, but they cannot enjoy them because when they forget God's grace, they are not able to appreciate their wealth and honor. They claim to be wise, but they are fools because they suppress the truth of God and pile up the wrath of God on their heads.

Second, God gives them over in the sinful desires of their hearts. Look at verse 24a. "Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts..." As we know well, each person needs his parents' love and protection. When he is grown up he needs God's love and protection. Especially, he needs the truth of God to feed his inner man. But when he only concentrates on his sinful desires, God gives him over in the sinful desires of his heart. Look at verses 24,26,28. "God gave them over." This phrase is repeated several times. When men deliberately rejected God, God could not but give them over to their sinful desires. God is like the father in the parable of the prodigal son. God, out of respect for mankind, never takes away man's freedom of choice. So God leaves them alone to take care of themselves. Man without God's care is utterly tragic because they have to live in a world where there is no God. When one young girl was dismissed from her job, she felt sorry. How much sorrier to be abandoned by God.

Third, they become liars. Look at verse 25. "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie..." There is no more truth of God in their hearts; instead, their hearts are full of lies. They lie to justify their sinful behavior. God cannot help such people. He cannot but give them over to their sinful desires. In other words, God cannot take care of them when they reject the truth of God and become liars. (Jn 8:44) Liars are miserable because they lie to eat three meals a day.

Fourth, they become unnatural and perverse. (26,27) Look at verse 26b. "Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones." A woman is the symbol of beauty and the mother of the universe. But when they live without God, some cannot satisfy their promiscuous desires with men only, so these women satisfy their desires with other women. As a result, they lose their womanly beauty and become women of perversion. Men are symbols of courage and protection. But when men live without God, they become too sensitive and fearful. They also cannot satisfy their physical desires with their wives, so they satisfy their desires with other men. (27) In other words, they engage in homosexuality, which is most unnatural and perverse in the sight of God. In this way they provoke God to anger, and they pile up the wrath of God on their heads.

Fifth, they develop a godless society. Read verses 28-31. An individual person is a member of a family. A family is a unit of a society. A society is a unit of a nation. When an individual lives without faith in God, his bad influence rapidly spreads over a family and to a society and finally to a nation and to the world. Godless men are so depraved that they no longer think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God. (28) But when they have no faith in God in their hearts, they become filled with every kind of wickedness. They have nothing good in them--only evil, for every good thing is from God. (Ja 1:17) They come to the point where they cannot forgive themselves; they think suicide is the best remedy. In a godless society each person is selfish and devilish. This kind of society cannot stand.

When we read verses 28-31, we can see an exact picture of hell.

Where God is, there is the kingdom of God; where there is no God, there is hell. Nobody can be happy living in a hell like this. Fallen men think they will be happy if they live without God, but this is not true. Men are truly miserable when they live in a society where total depravity rules. When men cut their relationship with God, they also cut their relationships with each other. There was a nice high school girl. When she studied the Bible, she looked so pretty and nice. But after visiting her divorced father she became a mental patient. All this tragedy came from man's sin of living without faith in God.

Sixth, they become advertisers of evil-doing. Look at verse 32. "Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them." People do such terrible things because they are no longer themselves. They are extremely evil. They do only evil things even though they know that doing such things brings the death penalty. But they do these things anyway because they are ruled by Satan. They know that they should not encourage others to do such evil things, but they do, not because they want to, but because they are the servants of Satan.

### III. The legalistic Jews (2:1-5)

First, they passed judgment on others. They were supposed to be the shepherds and Bible teachers for all people. (Ro 3:1,2) What a glorious privilege and responsibility it was for them to be a chosen people. But they did not build people up with the word of God. Instead, with their Bible knowledge they passed judgment on others and made them helpless. However, they did the same things as those on whom they passed judgment. Verse 1 says, "...you who pass judgment do the same things." Again, verse 3 says, "...you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things..." The Jews invaded God's position as the Judge: They were hypocritical. For example, they did not eat pigs or animals with cloven hoofs; they judged those who ate such animals. But then they made sausage from these meats and ate them deliciously when no one was looking. Moreover, they passed judgment when they have no such right as mere men to do so. God is the Judge who can judge men.

Second, they abused the love of God. Look at verse 4. "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?" God had been so patient with his people, waiting for them to repent and grow as a priestly nation. But these Jews did not realize God's love. Rather, they abused God's love endlessly. In this way the Jews also suppressed the truth and piled up the wrath of God.

Third, they were unrepentant. Look at verse 5. "But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed." They were stubborn with their fixed ideas. And they were unrepentant in their self-righteousness. However sanctified they might have been, they were nothing but wretched sinners before God. It is common sense that the more one grows spiritually in God, the more he must realize that he is a wretched sinner. But the Jews were so proud that they were unrepentant. Because of their stubbornness and unrepentant hearts, they were storing up the wrath of God for themselves.

#### IV. God's righteous judgment (2:6-16)

First, God judges according to the purpose of one's life. Look at verses 6,7. "God 'will give to each person according to what he has done.' To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life." God judges a man according to the purpose of his life. The Jews did many things for God. But their deep motive for doing God's work was self-seeking. Therefore, they could not escape God's wrath and judgment. Let's read verse 9. "There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile..." There is no partiality in God's judgment. Those who live for their own glory are only storing up the wrath of God on their heads. Read verse 10. "...but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." May God give you glory, honor and peace when you live for the glory of God.

Second, God judges according to one's conscience. (12-16) Paul also talks about God's judgment for the Gentiles. The Gentiles do not have the Law. So they are not judged by the Jewish law, but by their own consciences. (14,15) They cannot make the excuse that they don't know the law, because their consciences will convict them. Standards and levels of conscience differ according to cultural background; however, as Kant said, "Just as there are stars in the sky, so there is a conscience in each man's heart." This conscience helps each one to know the law of God.

In this passage we learn that we have inborn knowledge of God. Therefore we should not say, "There is no God." If we live without God, we only suppress the truth of God and pile up the wrath of God throughout our lifetimes. Therefore, let's live by faith.