



# Commentary on Romans

## “The Gospel of God”

### Chapter 1:18 - 25

By

Mark McGee

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# The Wrath of God Revealed

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them.” Romans 1:18-19

We move now from Paul’s great thematic statement about not being ashamed of the Gospel of God – “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’” – to humanity’s great need for the Gospel – “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.”

That is the most frightening statement ever uttered by man to men. The “wrath” of Almighty God is “revealed” from “heaven” against “all ungodliness and unrighteousness” of men. What can mere creatures do in the face of the wrath of the Creator revealed from Heaven against them? Is there no hope?

## *The Importance of Revelation*

How could humans know anything about their Creator without “revelation”? How could humans know anything about what their Creator expected from them without “revelation”?

The Greek word for “revelation” is ἀποκάλυψις. It comes from ἀποκαλύπτω – which combines ἀπό (away from) and καλύπτω (veil, cover). The noun ἀποκάλυψις means an “uncovering, unveiling.”

As we saw earlier in our study of Romans that the Eternal God designed an Eternal Plan to save people “before time began.” How would people, who were not created until after time began, learn about God’s plan? They couldn’t and wouldn’t unless God “revealed” it to them.

God began revealing His eternal plan to man in the Garden of Eden –

“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’ Genesis 2:16-17

God has continued to reveal His plan throughout the ages, but there were many times when He did not give His people new revelation. The first time we see the Hebrew word for “revelation” used in the Bible was about such a time –

“Now the boy Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; *there was* no widespread revelation. And it came to pass at that time, while Eli was lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the Lord where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying

down, that the Lord called Samuel ... Then the Lord said to Samuel: Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them. And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever." 1 Samuel 3:1-4, 11-14

The Hebrew word translated "revelation" in 1 Samuel 3 is *חֲזוֹן* (*chazon*) and means "vision." Another Hebrew word for "visions" is *מַחֲזֵה* (*machazeh*)  
After sin came between God and man in the Garden of Eden, God revealed Himself to man primarily through visions –

"Then the Lord said to Samuel: 'Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle ... And Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision.'" 1 Samuel 3:11, 15

"After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward.'" Genesis 15:1

"Then God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, 'Jacob, Jacob!' And he said, 'Here I am.'" Genesis 46:2

"Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, *I*, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream."

Numbers 12:6

"He sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God; and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper." 2 Chronicles 26:5

"And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions." Joel 2:28

"Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, 'Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.'" Matthew 17:9

"About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, 'Cornelius!'" Acts 10:3

"Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance." Acts 26:18-20

"It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord." 2 Corinthians 12:1

“And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone.” Revelation 9:17

### *The Wrath of God Revealed*

αποκαλυπτεται γαρ οργη θεου

Literal – “For it is revealed the wrath of God”

Many things are revealed in the Bible –

- Joseph “revealed” himself to his brothers
- God chose to “reveal” specific to His children
- God “revealed” Himself to His prophets
- God “revealed” His secrets to His prophets
- God “revealed” His power and glory to His people
- God “revealed” His righteousness to Jew and Gentile
- God “revealed” His Son to the world
- God “revealed” His Son in His children
- God “revealed” His truth to His followers
- God “revealed” the things which He had prepared for those who love Him
- God “revealed” the mystery of His will
- God “revealed” His righteousness from “faith to faith”

- God "revealed" His wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men

"For it is revealed" – αποκαλυπτεται γαρ

This usage of the verb αποκαλυπτεται in verses 17 and 18 is the same – present tense, indicative mood, passive voice. Paul stated that God was revealing both His righteousness and His wrath at the time the apostle was writing. Neither event was something God would reveal in the future. It was a fact at the present time.

That brings us to the word "wrath." It is οργη and translates as "anger, wrath, passion, indignation." *Orge* comes from *orgáō*, which means "to teem, swell up to oppose." It carries the idea of being a "settled anger" that is in opposition to something. The word describes the passionate attitude God has against something. That something is "all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

"against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" – επι πασαν ασεβειαν και αδικιαν ανθρωπων

The word ασεβειαν means "impiety, irreverence, disrespect, without due respect." In Paul's context it was people's irreverence and lack of respect for God.

The words και αδικιαν ανθρωπων speak to the unrighteous and unjust ways of men. One way to understand the statement is to look at what God told Israel thousands of years ago about how they were to respect Him and each other (Exodus 20 – Ten Commandments). Jesus directed the attention of people toward the same idea when He said –

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second *is* like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 22:37-40

God is a passionate and jealous God (e.g. Exodus 34:14). He wants and commands respect. God also wants and commands that people treat each other justly. What Paul wrote in Romans 1:18 is that God revealed His wrath – His passionate anger and indignation – toward humanity because of their lack of respect for Him and their unjust attitude and actions toward each other.

### *From Heaven*

Paul wrote that God revealed His wrath απ ουρανου – from Heaven. That’s important to notice for the context of what Paul is claiming. God has the “right” to reveal His wrath against the human race because it comes from His position as Creator of the universe.

“For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, Nor *are* your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are

My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8-9

God is far above His creation and is displeased with how human beings around the world treat Him and each other. Even as it was true during Paul's time and is true during our time, it has been true throughout the history of the human race. We will look into that in more depth in our next study. Here are a few thoughts to consider until then.

"Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the Lord and against His Anointed, *saying*, 'Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us.' He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure." Psalm 2:1-5

"The Lord *is* in His holy temple, The Lord's throne *is* in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. The Lord tests the righteous, But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates." Psalm 11:4-5

"The fool has said in his heart, '*There is no God.*' They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned

aside, They have together become corrupt; *There is* none who does good, No, not one." Psalm 14:1-3

# The History of God's Wrath

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them." Romans 1:18-19

In the last chapter we looked at the concept of God revealing His wrath from Heaven "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." In this chapter we will look at the history of God's wrath revealed from Heaven.

The first large-scale example of God revealing His wrath from Heaven is found in the early part of the Book of Genesis –

"Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.'" Genesis 6:5-7

This is the culmination of what began with the first man and woman sinning against their Creator in the Garden of Eden. God removed Adam and Eve from the Garden after promising that the woman's "Seed" would crush Satan. Cain, their firstborn son, murdered his brother Abel and fled from the

presence of God and his parents. Cain started his own family and built a city. Genesis 4 lists the descendants of Cain and the contempt they had for God (Genesis 4:23-24). Eve conceived and gave birth to another son, Seth, and said of him – “For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed” (Genesis 4:25). Seth later had a son and named him Enosh. It was at that time that men began calling on the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:26). The 5th chapter of Genesis contains the descendants of Seth from Enosh to Noah.

It was during Noah’s lifetime that God revealed His wrath from Heaven “against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” Why? Because the “earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth” (Genesis 6:11-12).

God certainly had the right to “destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air,” because He was the Creator of the heavens and the earth and all things in it. “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” The Bible says Noah “was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God” (Genesis 6:9). God chose to continue His relationship with humanity through Noah and his family.

Noah found “grace” in the eyes of the Lord, but what happened to those not in Noah’s family? That is where we learn how God’s grace and justice co-exist –

“And God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch.’”

Genesis 6:13-14

God demonstrated **grace** to Noah even as He carried out His plan for **divine justice** –

“Now the flood was on the earth forty days. The waters increased and lifted up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. The waters prevailed and greatly increased on the earth, and the ark moved about on the surface of the waters. And the waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth, and all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered. The waters prevailed fifteen cubits upward, and the mountains were covered. And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. All in whose nostrils *was* the breath of the spirit of life, all that *was* on the dry *land*, died. So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who *were* with him in the ark remained *alive*. And the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days.” Genesis 7:17-24

God promised Noah and his descendants that He would continue to rule the earth with grace and justice, but said He would never destroy the earth with water again (Genesis 9).

It's important to remember that God **revealing** His wrath is not the same as a man **losing** his temper. God's "wrath" is linked to His personal "glory." When Moses asked God to show him His glory, God told Moses He would make all His **goodness** pass before him (Exodus 33:19). Here's what God showed Moses (what He called His "goodness") –

- merciful
- gracious
- longsuffering
- abounding in goodness and truth
- keeping mercy for thousands
- forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin

The Hebrew words translated "longsuffering" in Exodus 34:6 are *'erek* *'appayim* and mean "slow to anger." God has an absolute right to be angry about ungodliness and unrighteousness and express His anger toward those who live ungodly and unrighteously in the world He created, but part of God's "goodness" is His being "slow to anger." That is beneficial to humans because God gives them (us) time to repent of ungodliness and unrighteousness. God is a merciful, gracious, longsuffering God who "abounds" in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving their sins.

The Old Testament lists many times that God revealed His wrath from heaven against the “ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” Keep in mind that it followed a lengthy time of God “suffering” with the sins of people. The length of time between the beginning of the sin and the punishment of the sin is an example of God’s **goodness**.

Some of the following are examples of God personally revealing His wrath. God also revealed His wrath through angels, His people, and through enemies of His people. Be sure to look at each reference and note the “ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” that preceded the outpouring of God’s wrath and keep in mind how long God had suffered with their iniquity, transgression and sin –

- Confusing Languages at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)
- Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19)
- Plagues in Egypt (Exodus 7 – 12)
- Drowning the Egyptian Army (Exodus 14)
- Destruction of Israelites for worshipping golden calf (Exodus 32)
- Death Sentence for those who rebelled against God (Numbers 14)
- Destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numbers 16)
- Destruction of Israelites who had committed harlotry with the women of Moab (Numbers 25)
- Conquering of cities, armies and kings in Canaan (Joshua 6 – 11)
- Defeat of Goliath and the Philistines (1 Samuel 17)
- Destruction of the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18)
- Conquering of Israel by Assyria (2 Kings 17)
- Conquering of Judah by Babylon (2 Kings 24)

- Destruction of Jerusalem prophesied by Jesus (Matthew 23-24; Luke 21)

The Old and New Testaments also include prophecies of God's future wrath against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Here are some examples –

- Isaiah 9
- Daniel 9 & 12
- Micah 5
- Matthew 24
- Mark 13
- Luke 21
- 2 Thessalonians 2
- Revelation 6 – 20

# Suppressing The Truth

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them.” Romans 1:18-19

The words “ungodliness” and “unrighteousness” are important to understand. The Greek word for “ungodliness” is ἀσέβεια and the word for “unrighteousness” is ἀδικίαν. The word ἀσέβεια was used in Ancient Greek writing for discord with God (irreverence) and ἀδικίαν for discord with other people (immorality). The way Paul wrote the text – πᾶσαν ἀσέβειαν καὶ ἀδικίαν – demonstrates that the discords were to be seen as being demonstrated together by the same people. “... all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” is the full disobedience of the Ten Commandments and the Law of Christ (Mark 12:28-34) by humans.

As we will see in our study of Romans, Paul addressed the sinfulness of both Jews and Gentiles and we should view God’s wrath being revealed against both. Paul’s use of both words in the same sentence strengthens the force of the expressions and demonstrates God’s rightful position in revealing His wrath against all of them.

## *Truth Suppressed*

As we read through the history of humanity in the record of the Bible we see how ungodly and unrighteous people suppressed the truth in unrighteousness generation after generation. Let's begin by defining "suppressed."

The Greek word used in Romans 1:18 is *katechó* (κατέχω). It translates as "hold down, hold back, bind, restrain, detain, hinder, arrest."

The literal reads –

"is revealed indeed wrath of God from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, the truth by unrighteousness suppressing"

The logical progression of suppressing truth is –

**truth revealed → truth received (known) → truth rejected → truth suppressed by unrighteousness**

The stated mechanism by which the receiver of truth rejects and suppresses that truth is "by unrighteousness."

ἐν ἀδικία κατεχόντων – by unrighteousness suppressing

The suppression of truth is accomplished by "unrighteousness." ἀδικία translates as "injustice, opposite of justice, hurt" and comes from ἄδικος which means "without justice, wicked." Ancient Jewish Greek writings also

use the word ἀδικία as a term for violence that comes from wickedness. That will be important to remember as we continue our study.

Let's look at some of the earliest examples of suppressing truth by unrighteousness –

### EXAMPLE 1

**God created angels and revealed truth to them → some angels received God's truth → some angels rejected God's truth → those angels suppressed God's truth**

How do we know this to be true? Here is the logical flow of information —  
GOD CREATED ANGELS →

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." John 1:1-2

"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him." Colossians 1:16

GOD REVEALED TRUTH TO THEM →

"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely

you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, When the morning stars sang together, And all the sons of God shouted for joy?" Job 38:4-7

#### SOME ANGELS RECEIVED GOD'S TRUTH —>

"The Lord has established His throne in heaven, And His kingdom rules over all. Bless the Lord, you His angels, Who excel in strength, who do His word, Heeding the voice of His word. Bless the Lord, all *you* His hosts, *You* ministers of His, who do His pleasure." Psalm 103:19-21

#### SOME ANGELS REJECTED GOD'S TRUTH —>

"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Luke 10:18

"And the devil said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.' But Jesus answered him, saying, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" Luke 4:3-4

"The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked *one*. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels." Matthew 13:38-39

"The sower sows the word. And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts." Mark 4:14-15

"I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God." Acts 26:17-18

"And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly." Romans 16:20

#### THOSE ANGELS SUPPRESSED GOD'S TRUTH —>

"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die ... Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'' ... Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'" Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1, 4-5

"Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me." John 8:43-45

"For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light." 2 Corinthians 11:14

## EXAMPLE 2

**God revealed truth to Cain about the power of sin → Cain heard God's truth → Cain rejected God's truth →**

**God revealed truth to Cain about the power of sin →**

"So the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire *is* for you, but you should rule over it.'" Genesis 4:6-7

**Cain heard God's truth and rejected it —>**

"Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where *is* Abel your brother?' He said, 'I do not know. *Am* I my brother's keeper?' And He said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you *are* cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.' And Cain said to the Lord, 'My punishment *is* greater than I can bear! Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen *that* anyone who finds me will kill me.' And the Lord said to him, "Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.' And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him." Genesis 4:8-15

**EXAMPLE 3**

**God revealed truth to Cain —> Cain's family heard God's truth —>  
Cain's descendants rejected God's truth—>**

"Then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he built a city, and called the name of

the city after the name of his son—Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad begot Mehujael, and Mehujael begot Methushael, and Methushael begot Lamech. Then Lamech took for himself two wives: the name of one was Adah, and the name of the second was Zillah. And Adah bore Jabal. He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal. He was the father of all those who play the harp and flute. And as for Zillah, she also bore Tubal-Cain, an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron. And the sister of Tubal-Cain was Naamah. Then Lamech said to his wives: 'Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; Wives of Lamech, listen to my speech! For I have killed a man for wounding me, Even a young man for hurting me. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.'" Genesis 4:16-24

#### EXAMPLE 4

**God revealed truth to Seth and Enosh → Seth and Enosh heard God's truth → Seth and Enosh's descendants rejected God's truth →**

"And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, 'For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.' And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then *men* began to call on the name of the Lord ... Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they *were* beautiful; and they took

wives for themselves of all whom they chose ... Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' " Genesis 4:25-26; 6:1-2, 5-7

### EXAMPLE 5

**God revealed truth to Noah and his sons —> Noah and his sons heard God's truth —> The descendants of Noah and his sons rejected God's truth —>**

**God revealed truth to Noah and his sons —>**

"So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move *on* the earth, and on all the fish of the sea.'" Genesis 9:1-2

**Noah and his sons heard God's truth —>**

"Now the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And Ham was the father of Canaan. These three *were* the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated."  
Genesis 9:18-19

**The descendants of Noah and his sons rejected God's truth —>**

"Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and bake *them* thoroughly.' They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *is* in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.' But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, 'Indeed the people *are* one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.' So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth." Genesis 11:1-9

This "suppression of truth" continued throughout the history of God's people. In just about every major story we read in Scripture we see people suppressing God's truth – holding it down, holding it back, binding it, restraining it, detaining it, hindering it, arresting it. How did they suppress God's truth? By (in) "unrighteousness."

That is the sad history of the human race, summed up in Paul's statement –

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

# The Purpose of God's Wrath

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them." Romans 1:18-19

One of the questions I hear often from atheists and agnostics is what right God has to be angry with the way people behave "if" He created them. While the question is sometimes asked with the belief that it is a "*defeater*" of theism, it is not. We read in Genesis 1:31 that "God saw everything that He had made, and indeed *it was* very good." God said that after creating Adam and Eve. So, why would God reveal His wrath from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men if everything He created was "very good"?

The answer is found in Genesis 2 where God warned Adam about eating from "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." We know from Eve's statement in Genesis 3 that Adam had shared that warning with her –

"And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

We know from what Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:14 that "Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression." Adam disobeyed God even though he knew the truth. That's why Paul wrote –

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned ... For as in Adam all die ..." Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:22

As we saw in our last study, Adam suppressed the truth in an act that can be understood as "unrighteousness." God told Adam the truth that in the day he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he would "surely die." Adam ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and God revealed His wrath on that same day –

"To the woman He said: 'I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire *shall be* for your husband, And he shall rule over you.' Then to Adam He said, 'Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': 'Cursed *is* the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat *of* it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you *are*, And to dust you shall return.'" Genesis 3:16-19

One positive note we can take away from the encounter is what God said to the serpent (Satan) –

“So the Lord God said to the serpent: ‘Because you have done this, You *are* cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.’ Genesis 3:14-15

We will see how important that promise is as we continue our study of Romans, but for now let’s return to the question of why God reveals His wrath against people.

“... because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them.”

ΔΙΟΤΙ ΤΟ ΓΝΩΣΤΟΝ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ ΦΑΝΕΡΟΝ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΕΝ ΑΥΤΟΙΣ Ο ΓΑΡ ΘΕΟΣ ΑΥΤΟΙΣ ΕΦΑΝΕΡΩΣΕΝ

Literal readings of Romans 1:19 include – “because the known of God manifest is among them God indeed to them has revealed” and “because the thing known of God manifest is among them for to them God manifested.”

What is "the known" or "thing known" of God mean?

ΔΙΟΤΙ ΤΟ ΓΝΩΣΤΟΝ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ

ΔΙΟΤΙ is a conjunction and means "because, on this account, for." It is used emphatically and is understood as meaning "on account of that."

ΓΝΩΣΤΟΝ is an adjective and is an experiential "knowledge" (from the verb γινώσκω – I come to know, learn, realize through first-hand experience). This experiential knowledge is του θεου – of God. Humans have an experiential knowledge of God. How so?

ΦΑΝΕΡΟΝ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΕΝ ΑΥΤΟΙΣ

ΦΑΝΕΡΟΝ is an adjective which means "apparent, clear, visible, manifest."

### *God Is Not Hidden*

Another question I hear from atheists and agnostics is – "why is God hidden? Why doesn't God show Himself to us if He exists?" The Apostle Paul made it clear that God is NOT hidden. God has shown His existence "clearly, visibly," ΕΣΤΙΝ ΕΝ ΑΥΤΟΙΣ – "among them." The word εν can be understood to mean "inside, within." The experiential knowledge of God is "inside, within" people. How did that happen?

One important note before we move forward – God began His creative relationship with the first humans through self-revelation. By that, I mean that the first humans (Adam and Eve) saw their Creator.

“And the Lord God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed ... Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die ... And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man ... And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, ‘Where *are* you?’ So he said, ‘I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself ... therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.’ Genesis 2:7-8, 16-17, 21-22; 3:8-10, 23-24

What we see here is that God had a personal, hands-on relationship with Adam and Eve. He “formed” man from the dust of the ground, “breathed” into his nostrils the breath of life, “put” the man into a garden that was east of Eden where God had created him, gave him a verbal “warning” about not eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “caused” a deep sleep to fall on the man, “took” one of the man’s ribs and “made” the first woman from it, and “brought” the woman to the man. The man and woman “heard the sound” of the Lord God “walking in the garden” in the cool of the day. God “spoke” to them and they “answered.”

What we read here is not a God who “hid” Himself from the humans He created. We know from several Scriptures (e.g. John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Hebrews 1:2-3) that Jesus Christ, God the Son, created all things including Adam and Eve –

- God the Son “formed” Adam and breathed life into his body
- God the Son “created” a garden east of Eden and “put” Adam there to tend and keep it
- God the Son verbally “warned” Adam about not eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil
- God the Son “caused” a deep sleep to fall on Adam
- God the Son “took” one of Adam’s ribs and “made” Eve
- God the Son “brought” Eve to Adam
- Adam and Eve “heard the sound” of God the Son “walking in the garden” in the cool of the day
- God the Son “spoke” to Adam and Eve and they “answered”

Hidden? Where in this historical record do you see a "hidden" God? The Son of God, who is the "image of the invisible God," "the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person," revealed Himself to Adam and Eve in the garden. There was no "hiding" on God's part. Adam and Eve did the hiding – "Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden" (Genesis 3:8)

Picking up again in Romans 1:19 –

ο γαρ θεος αυτοις εφανερωσεν – "God indeed to them has revealed"

God "revealed" the experiential knowledge of Him within every human being. He is our Creator. We are alive because His "breath" is in us.

That's interesting in the context of the "wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

The Greek word translated "revealed" in Romans 1:18 is ἀποκαλύπτω. The word translated "revealed" in Romans 1:19 is εφανερωσεν. What do we learn from how these different Greek words are used in the same context?

ἀποκαλύπτω is a verb that means "uncover, bring to light, reveal." εφανερωσεν is a verb that means "make clear, visible, or manifest." It is similar to φανερόν which Paul used a few words earlier. God's wrath is "uncovered, brought to light" because what was "made clear, visible" is inside people. While there are things about God that were hidden until

revealed (e.g. His wrath), His existence was not and is not hidden. In fact, it is very clear.

# The Clarity of God’s Existence

“For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead ...” Romans 1:20

τα γαρ αορατα αυτου απο κτισεως κοσμου τοις ποιημασιν νοουμενα καθοραται η τε αιδιος αυτου δυναμις και θειοτης

A literal translation of this Scripture would be – “the indeed invisible qualities of Him from creation of world by the things made being understood are clearly seen the both eternal of Him power and divinity.”

We begin with the “invisibility” of God. The Greek word is *ἀόρατα* –

- Moses reminded Israel that “the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; *you* only *heard* a voice” (Deuteronomy 4:12).
- John wrote that “No one has seen God at any time” (John 1:18).
- Paul reminded the Colossians that Jesus “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (Colossians 1:15).
- Paul told Timothy about God being “eternal, immortal, invisible ... who alone is wise” (1 Timothy 1:17).
- The author of Hebrews wrote concerning Moses that “By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:27).

- Moses asked God to see His glory and God replied "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live" (Exodus 33:20). Though God is invisible, He allowed Moses to see His "goodness."

"I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Exodus 33:19

The "goodness" of God is a primary attribute or "quality" of God. That's what Paul addressed in Romans 1:20 – "For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen." God mentioned His "goodness," His being "gracious," and His having "compassion" as what He would show Moses –

"Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.'" Exodus 34:5-7

The invisible God “proclaimed” that He is –

- merciful
- gracious
- longsuffering
- abounding in goodness and truth
- keeping mercy for thousands
- forgiving iniquity, and transgressions and sin
- by no means clearing the guilty
- visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation

God made His invisible qualities/attributes known to Moses in an unusual way. I say unusual because that is not how God “usually” shows His invisible qualities to people. The usual way, Paul wrote, is “understood by the things that are made.” That statement is part of the larger statement Paul made to the Romans – “For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made ...”

The words “creation” and “made” connect in this sentence.

ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου – from creation of world

τοῖς ποιήμασιν – by the things made

The word κτίσεως is a noun from the verb κτίζω, which means "create, form, make." It was always used of something God had done.

The word ποιήμασιν is a noun from the verb ποιέω, which means "make, manufacture, cause, act."

*"even His eternal power and Godhead"*

η τε αιδιος αυτου δυναμις και θειοτης

Paul makes it clear in this statement that two of God's "invisible" qualities/attributes that have been "clearly seen" since the "creation of the world" and "understood" by the "things that are made" are His "eternal power" and "Godhead."

What are the "things" that God made during "creation"?

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Genesis 1:1

As we read through Genesis 1 we see that God made space (the universe), then filled that space. He created the heavens and the earth, then filled both with things animate and inanimate. God's act of creating the universe and everything in it, Paul wrote, was a visible demonstration of God's "eternal power and Godhead."

King David wrote –

“The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. *There is* no speech nor language *Where* their voice is not heard.” Psalm 19:1-3

The prophet Isaiah wrote –

“To whom then will you liken Me, Or *to whom* shall I be equal?’ says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, And see who has created these *things*, Who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, By the greatness of His might And the strength of *His* power; Not one is missing.” Isaiah 40:25-26

“For thus says the Lord, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: ‘I *am* the Lord, and *there is* no other.’” Isaiah 45:18

The Apostle John wrote –

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” John 1:1-3

"You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."

Revelation 4:11

The Apostle Paul wrote –

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist."

Colossians 1:15-17

"eternal power" comes from the Greek words *αἰδιος δυναμις*. *αἰδιος* is an adjective that means "eternal, everlasting." It comes from the adverb *αἰ* which means "always, without ceasing, perpetually." *δυναμις* is a noun that means "physical power, force, might, ability, energy."

Because God is Eternal and All Powerful He was able to make everlasting covenants with Noah, Abraham, Jacob and King David.

"The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that *is* on the earth." Genesis 9:16

"And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you." Genesis 17:7

"Then Jacob said to Joseph: 'God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.'" Genesis 48:3-4

"Although my house *is* not so with God, Yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, Ordered in all *things* and secure." 2 Samuel 23:5

"Godhead" comes from the Greek noun *θειότης* and means "divinity, divine nature." It comes from the adjective *θειός* which comes from the noun *θεός* (God, deity). Several other English translations of the Bible use the terms "divine nature" to translate *θειότης*.

The Greeks and Romans had a long history of believing in gods and goddesses. One of the oldest writings about divines in Greek culture is from the 8th century BC –

"Hail, children of Zeus! Grant lovely song and celebrate the holy race of the deathless gods who are for ever, those that were born of Earth and starry Heaven and gloomy Night and them that briny Sea did rear. Tell

how at the first gods and earth came to be, and rivers, and the boundless sea with its raging swell, and the gleaming stars, and the wide heaven above, and the gods who were born of them, givers of good things, and how they divided their wealth, and how they shared their honours amongst them, and also how at the first they took manyfolded Olympus. These things declare to me from the beginning, ye Muses who dwell in the house of Olympus, and tell me which of them first came to be." *The Theogony of Hesiod*, ll. 104-115, translation by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

The oldest writings about "divines" (gods) may be the Sumerians and date to the early 3rd millennium BC. These ancient people believed there were multiple gods and goddesses. Where did that belief originate? One possibility is found in Genesis 10 –

"Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, 'Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord.' And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (that *is* the principal city)." Genesis 10:8-12

Here's more about Nimrod's kingdom and the Sumerian/Mesopotamian religions that came from it –

“Human history is filled with thousands of ‘heroes’ who were leaders of millions of people through the ages. Kings and other leaders were deified as ‘mighty men’ of old (ancestor worship). Nimrod was mentioned as one of the first after the Flood. Even as Noah taught the existence of only one supreme God (monotheism) Who created and ruled the universe and everything in it, Nimrod taught the belief system of many gods (polytheism), many of whom were part human and part god, ‘heroes’ of the earth and sky. Nimrod has been connected with many “mighty men” through the ages including those of Gilgamesh, Bel, Belus, Titan, Hercules and Melcarth.

Nimrod began his rebel kingdom at Babel. That is possibly the location where Nimrod believed the Garden of Eden had stood before the flood. His purpose for building a tower that would reach ‘unto heaven’ may have been because he saw the location as a direct gateway to the gods that could make humans immortal again or as a way to attain godhood himself. The ancient Assyrian-Babylonian name for the city was Babili (‘gate of god’). That’s where God confused human language. ‘Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.’ The Hebrew word for the city is Babel and came from the word ‘balal’ (to confound). Many scholars believed the ‘Tower of Babel’ was located somewhere in Babylon, though its exact location was not known for sure. Some of the places

archaeologists and other researchers believed the tower was built included the ruins of Babil, the temple of Borsippa, the ruins of Tell-Amram and the ruins of the Birs-Nimrud in Borsippa. The ruins were located about 60 miles south of Baghdad, Iraq along the Euphrates River. Ancient descriptions of the tower were of a terraced pyramid known as a ziggurat (similar to the stepped pyramids of Egypt). The word 'ziggurat' came from the ancient Assyrian name for 'mountaintop.' Nimrod may have been the architect for the ziggurat-pyramid which became the earliest temples of worship of the gods. Since the entire human race was involved in building the first stepped pyramid at Babel, it's no wonder that many of the ancient civilizations built them. Even though the language was confounded and people were scattered across the earth, they carried with them a desire to touch heaven and find immortality again. Those who were scattered would have remembered Nimrod's design and what he taught them about how to reach heaven and immortality. The tower and city were not finished at that time because of the confusion caused when people could not understand each other. Possible genetic changes in physical features would have also caused great panic and fear among the people. God's confounding of the language was an immediate and devastating blow to the human race and to Nimrod's plans to regain the immortality Adam and Eve had in the Garden of Eden.

Babel was just the beginning of Nimrod's kingdom. He apparently left Babel after God confounded human language and moved miles away to build the ancient cities of Erech (later known as Urak), Accad (also spelled Akkad and Agade) and Calneh (also known as Nippur in Sumer,

modern day Niffer or Niffar, Iraq – Nippur was the home of the god Enlil and a center of spiritual worship in ancient Sumer) in the land of Shinar. If Nimrod's lifespan was similar to that of his cousins from Shem's lineage, he would have lived more than 400 years. That was plenty of time to build a powerful empire and he may have still been in power during the time of Abram. The Hebrew prophet Micah, who lived during the 8th century B.C., called the land of ancient Mesopotamia 'the land of Nimrod.' (Micah 5:6) That's how much power and influence Nimrod had during his reign as king of the first civilization following the Flood. Ancient Mesopotamia was the land of Nimrod. He left the mark of his ideas, beliefs and philosophy on the people of many generations. What Nimrod believed and did still affects the spiritual quest of billions of people to this day (the belief in the 'god' inside every human being – the potential to become a god or like the gods – and the 'many gods' in the earth and sky).

The cities Nimrod built became the centers of worship for many gods (Anunaki) and Nimrod may have been the first 'god' of ancient Mesopotamia. Many scholars believed King Nimrod was the model for the ancient god Nimrod of the Assyrian Palace of Khorsabad (located in Iraq). The ancient Babylonian god Bel Marduk was the patron god of Babylon and may have also been modeled after Nimrod. Ancient city-state kings were viewed as leaders, priests and representatives of the chief god of the community. Some scholars believed the ancient Sumerian gods Enki and Enlil were modeled after Nimrod as well as the Philistine god Dagon. The gods were immortal, but had human features and emotions. The belief in and search for immortality was possibly

Nimrod's largest legacy to the human race along with the development of the city states. Nimrod's Mesopotamian kingdom eventually grew to include the Sumerian, Babylonian and Akkadian empires (modern day Syria and Iraq)." *A History of Man's Quest for Immortality*, Mark McGee, Fifth Estate Publishing, 2007, pp. 481-483

### *How Many gods?*

"For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead ..." Romans 1:20

The Apostle Paul specified the time frame he was addressing in his letter to the Romans – "For since the creation of the world ..." As we look back to the early chapters of Genesis, we find the first grouping of human beings (Genesis 1 – 6) either worshiping one God or rebelling against one God. "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). Every intent of the thoughts of human beings was "evil continually," but we don't see that the evil included worshiping multiple gods.

What we do see in Genesis 4 is rebellion against God on the part of Cain and his descendants and worship of God on the part of Seth and his descendants. Enoch, who was seventh from Adam through the line of Seth, walked with God and was "taken" by God (Genesis 5:21-24). We learn in Hebrews 11 that by faith "Enoch was taken away so that he did not see

death, 'and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God." (Hebrews 11:5)

Noah, who is first mentioned in Genesis 5, was tenth from Adam through the line of Seth and it was during his lifetime that God saw "that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." God determined to destroy the human race, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8).

It's important to see that the first group of human beings (Genesis 1 – 6) either worshiped God or rebelled against God, but there's no evidence that polytheism (belief in multiple gods) had begun prior to Genesis 6. We know that the events of Genesis 7 – 9 (the Great Flood) brought humanity back to a position of worshiping the one true God, so when did the belief in many "gods" begin?

Nimrod was Noah's great-grandson and, based on the number of years given for his cousins in Genesis 11, was probably born about 40 years after the flood. Based on the genealogies of Noah's sons in Genesis 10 – 11, we see that the dispersion of families from Babel led to the worship of many gods in various cities, city-states and nations. Archaeological finds from the ancient civilizations started by the descendants of Noah's sons demonstrate a belief in multiple gods. Why?

"Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and bake *them* thoroughly.' They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *is* in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.' But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, 'Indeed the people *are* one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.' So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth." Genesis 11:1-9

It may be that the experience of the human race at the Tower of Babel shook people to their physical, emotional and spiritual core. The idea of an Almighty God who confused their languages (and possibly their physical features) and drove them away from accomplishing their desire to build a tower to the heavens and make a name for themselves so they wouldn't be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth, may have been a reason for early family groups to create their own gods that they could manipulate by appealing to natures similar to their own. No longer would they have to deal with an Almighty and Perfect God who they could not control. They created gods that were more like them, that they could control and that would give them what they wanted.

[I go into more depth about ancient religions, their myths and gods in *A History of Man’s Quest for Immortality.*]

## Without Excuse

“For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse ...” Romans 1:20

ΕΙΣ ΤΟ ΕΙΝΑΙ ΑΥΤΟΥΣ ΑΝΑΠΟΛΟΓΗΤΟΥΣ

The literal reads –

“for to be them without excuse”

The Greek word for “excuse” is αναπολογητους (*anapologétos*). The word is made up of the first letter of the Greek alphabet, ἄλφα (*alpha*), and ἀπολογέομαι (*apologeomai* – “give a defense”). The combination leads to the translation of “without defense, indefensible, inexcusable.” Someone who is αναπολογητους is someone who has no grounds for a defense and is therefore indefensible, inexcusable. They are “without excuse.”

The word ἀπολογία (*apologia*) was used in Ancient Greece for “a speech in defense,” usually presented by someone charged with a crime, the person presenting a legal defense. Plato’s *Apology of Socrates* is an example of how a defendant presented his *apologia* in a legal forum.

Paul used the term in that legal sense. All of humanity is "without excuse" (αναπολογητου) before the Eternal Judge. It is what we see in these references –

"But the Lord shall endure forever; He has prepared His throne for judgment. He shall judge the world in righteousness, And He shall administer judgment for the peoples in uprightness." Psalm 9:7-8

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained." Acts 17:30-31

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats." Matthew 25:31-32

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" Matthew 7:21-23

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." Revelation 20:11-15

Make no mistake .. Jesus Christ will judge the world and anyone not found written in the Book of Life will be αναπολογητους – **without excuse**.

### *Context*

The context of this part of Paul's letter to the Romans concerns –

- The wrath of God being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men
- Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them
- For since the creation of the world God's invisible attributes are seen clearly being understood by the that things that are made, even God's eternal power and Godhead

It is in that context Paul wrote "so that they are without excuse."

First question – who are "they"?

Paul began his timeframe with the words – "For since the creation of the world." What human beings were alive in that timeframe? Genesis 1 contains the history of creation –

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" Genesis 1:26-28

Genesis 2 has more details about God's creation of "man" –

"And the Lord God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being ... And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man." Genesis 2:7, 21-22

Adam and Eve, the first human beings, knew God personally. They walked and talked with Him in the Garden of Eden. They were eyewitnesses of what God had created. They saw the sky and rivers, forests and meadows, plants and animals. God told them that if they disobeyed Him concerning the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would die. They ate of the fruit of that tree and God revealed His wrath.

God said to Eve –

“I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire *shall be* for your husband, And he shall rule over you.” Genesis 3:16

God said to Adam –

“Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: ‘Cursed *is* the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat *of* it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you *are*, And to dust you shall return.” Genesis 3:17-19

Adam and Eve were “without excuse.” Eve blamed the serpent and Adam blamed Eve for what happened, but they were all without excuse before God. As we will see later in Romans, sin entered the world through Adam

and death through sin, "and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

Something we must not miss here is that even though Adam and Eve were without excuse before God, He had a plan to redeem them and others through His Eternal Son, Jesus Christ. God hinted at it when He cursed the serpent (Satan) –

"So the Lord God said to the serpent: 'Because you have done this, You *are* cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.'" Genesis 3:14-15

As Paul wrote the Corinthians, our redemption and restoration comes through Christ!

"For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive." 1 Corinthians 15:21-22

## *Cain Without Excuse*

Cain was the first-born son of Adam and Eve. He had a younger brother named Abel.

“Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire *is* for you, but you should rule over it.’ Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, ‘Where *is* Abel your brother?’ He said, ‘I do not know. *Am* I my brother’s keeper?’ And He said, ‘What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you *are* cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.” Genesis 4:2-12

Cain was jealous of his brother and God warned him about his anger and the danger of sin. Cain did not heed God's warning and killed his brother, then lied about it. God didn't accept Cain's lying excuse and cursed him. Cain, the first person born on earth, was without excuse.

### *Humanity Without Excuse*

Several hundred years after Cain killed Abel we see that humanity is intent on wickedness and evil.

"Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they *were* beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. And the Lord said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he *is* indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.' There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore *children* to them. Those *were* the mighty men who *were* of old, men of renown. Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. And the Lord *was* sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord."

The entire human race was without excuse before God and was deserving of His wrath, but God was gracious and blessed one person and his family. This pattern has been repeated throughout history. People are deserving of God's wrath, but He demonstrates mercy through His grace.

Here are some other Bible examples of humanity without excuse –

- Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)
- Egypt (Exodus 4 – 14)
- Israel (2 Kings 17)
- Judah (2 Kings 25)
- All People (Romans 1:20; Revelation 20:11-15)

Six powerful words in Paul's letter to the Romans – "*so that they are without excuse.*" However, even though all of humanity is without excuse before God, we have **hope** through Jesus Christ –

"To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Colossians 1:17

"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given *us* everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work." 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope ..." 1 Timothy 1:1

"... looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works." Titus 2:13-14

"Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." 1 Peter 1:3-5

Thank God for our Lord Jesus!

# The Invisible God

“For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Romans 1:20-21

It's important as we study Romans that we don't miss God's purpose when He inspired Paul to write it. God is revealing Himself to those He created in His "image" and "likeness" (Genesis 1:26-27).

So far we have seen that –

- The "gospel of God" which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerns "His Son Jesus Christ our Lord"
- Jesus Christ was declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, "by the resurrection from the dead"
- Those who believe in Christ and are called saints are "beloved of God"
- The Gospel of Christ is the "power of God to salvation for everyone who believes"
- The righteousness of God is revealed "from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'"

- The wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against "all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them"

When did God begin revealing Himself?

"For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead."

The word "invisible" (ἀόρατα) speaks of something that exists without being subject to being seen. The words "are clearly seen" (καθορᾶται) means to see something clearly and with perception. The "invisible" God can be seen clearly and understood (νοούμενα) "by the things that are made" (τοῖς ποιήμασιν). What can be known of God (His revelation of Himself) is both His "eternal power and Godhead" (ἀίδιος αὐτοῦ δύναμις καὶ θεϊότης).

God intended for His creatures (human beings) to know Him. He "caused" for that to be so. God created humans to clearly see and understand His eternal power and Deity.

Some people ask why God is "hidden." He is NOT hidden. He revealed Himself clearly by what He created. That includes "the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). What we see on earth, in the sky and in the distant heavens is a revelation of God's eternal power and Godhead. Even though

sin has tainted much of what we see (e.g. death, decay), God's eternal power and Deity are still clear and understood by what we see.

In the last chapter we saw six of the most powerful words in the Bible – “so that they are without excuse.” As we saw “they” includes every human being who has ever lived on earth. All people are “without” excuse. Why?

“... because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

διΟΤΙ γΝΟΝΤΕΣ ΤΟΝ ΘΕΟΝ ΟΥΧ ΩΣ ΘΕΟΝ ΕΔΟΞΑΣΑΝ Η ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΗΣΑΝ ΑΛΛ  
ΕΜΑΤΑΙΩΘΗΣΑΝ ΕΝ ΤΟΙΣ ΔΙΑΛΟΓΙΣΜΟΙΣ ΑΥΤΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΕΣΚΟΤΙΣΘΗ Η ΑΣΥΝΕΤΟΣ ΑΥΤΩΝ  
ΚΑΡΔΙΑ

## *Knew*

Let's spend a moment on the key word “knew.” The Greek word is γνοντες and means “come to know, learn, realize.” It is the idea of knowledge that comes through personal experience. Adam and Eve “knew” God personally. Cain and Abel “knew” God personally. They all had personal experiences with God. It is in the aorist tense, active voice, nominative case. The literal would be “having known.” Each of them had had past experiences with God. They “knew” Him.

The same is true with everyone who descended from Adam and Eve. According to Genesis 5, Adam lived 130 years and "begot" Seth. He lived 800 years after Seth was conceived. "So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died." That means Adam was a living testimony to the existence of God to many generations before he died. The descendants of Adam and Eve would "have known" God. That included the lineage of Cain and Seth. Everyone.

Paul wrote that they were all without excuse "because." This is important. There is a reason why every person who has ever lived is "without excuse." "because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful."

Wow! Let that sink in for a moment.

Even though they "knew" God. They "**knew**" God! God was not a fantasy to them. He wasn't a dream. He wasn't a myth or legend. He wasn't a fairytale. He was "real" to them! They "knew" Him! And how did they respond to that knowledge of God? "... they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful ..."

ουχ ως θεον εδοξασαν η ευχαριστησαν

## *Glorify*

They did not "glorify" Him as God. The word "glorify" in the Greek is εδοξασαν and means "glorify, honor, bestow glory on." The verb is aorist tense, indicative mood, active voice. It is something that the subject ("they") did in the past. It was a self-determined action. They chose **not** to glorify God.

What does it mean to "glorify" God? The word εδοξασαν comes from *dóksa* which comes from *dokeō* – "exercising personal opinion which determines value." They did not VALUE God!

How can you not value God? He is the Creator! The people named in the early chapters of Genesis "knew" God but did not value Him? The Greek word corresponds to the Hebrew word *קבד* (*kabowd*) which means "to be heavy". Think about the "weight," the "value" God has. He is Supreme, Sovereign, and Perfect. He is the Necessary Being and all else is dependent (contingent) on Him.

## *Thankful*

The word "thankful" is ηύχαρίστησαν. It is also aorist tense, indicative mood, active voice. Humanity chose **not** to be thankful to God for what He had done for them.

What happened when the human race, who knew God, did not glorify Him as God and were not thankful?

“... but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

ἀλλ' ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν καὶ ἐσκοτίσθη ἡ ἀσύνετος αὐτῶν καρδία

### *Futile, Foolish and Darkened*

The word “futile” is a translation of the Greek word ἐματαιώθησαν. It comes from the word μάταιο, which means “vain, unproductive, godless.” The idea of ἐματαιώθησαν is to become vain or foolish, perverted. The verb is aorist tense, indicative mood, and passive voice. It is something that happened in the past “to” the subject rather than “by” the subject. Something caused the “thoughts” of people to become “futile.” The Greek word is διαλογισμοῖς and means “calculation, reasoning, thought, movement of thought, deliberation, plotting.” It comes from διαλογίζομα (reason, debate, consider).

The words “foolish hearts” are ἀσύνετος αὐτῶν καρδία (foolish of them heart). ἀσύνετος (foolish) means “unintelligent, unwise, undiscerning.” As for καρδία (heart), ancient Greeks viewed the heart as being the center of their character that contained their inner self – their will and intention. Because people did not glorify God as God and were unthankful, they became unproductive in their thinking and unwise in their character. That is not an attractive picture of people.

The word for "darkened" is ἐσκοτίσθη. It comes from σκότος, which was used for physical and moral darkness. The verb is aorist tense, indicative mood, and passive voice. Like the word "futile," it is something that happened in the past "to" the subject rather than "by" the subject. Something "darkened" the hearts of people.

So, what acted on the human race to become "futile in their thoughts" and "darkened" in their hearts? Romans 1:18 is the thematic statement –

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

## *Sin*

Ungodliness and unrighteousness is what acted on the minds and hearts of people. Why do people "hold the truth in unrighteousness"? Because of the action of sin in their lives. It is because of the action and results of sin that humanity has been and continues to be lost in moral darkness. It is because of the action and results of sin that people treat people inhumanely.

This truth is not hard to support from historical evidence. We begin with the biblical view of history –

"Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Genesis 6:5

"The fool has said in his heart, '*There is no God.*' They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; *There is none who does good, No, not one.*" Psalm 14

"Surely every man walks about like a shadow; Surely they busy themselves in vain; He heaps up *riches*, And does not know who will gather them." Psalm 39:6

"Remember how short my time is; For what futility have You created all the children of men?" Psalm 89:7

"The Lord knows the thoughts of man, That they *are* futile." Psalm 94:11

"The wicked will see *it* and be grieved; He will gnash his teeth and melt away; The desire of the wicked shall perish." Psalm 112:10

"Do not put your trust in princes, *Nor* in a son of man, in whom *there is* no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; In that very day his plans perish." Psalm 146:3-4

"When a wicked man dies, *his* expectation will perish, And the hope of the unjust perishes." Proverbs 11:7

"We have heard of the pride of Moab— *He is* very proud— Of his haughtiness and his pride and his wrath; *But* his lies *shall not be* so. Therefore Moab shall wail for Moab; Everyone shall wail." Isaiah 16:6-7

"The voice said, 'Cry out!' And he said, 'What shall I cry?' 'All flesh *is* grass, And all its loveliness *is* like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, Because the breath of the Lord blows upon it; Surely the people *are* grass.'" Isaiah 40:6-7

"Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, And her high gates shall be burned with fire; The people will labor in vain, And the nations, because of the fire; And they shall be weary.'" Jeremiah 51:58

"For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their *own* craftiness'; and again, 'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.'" 1 Corinthians 3:19-20

"This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." Ephesians 4:17-29

[One of the primary historical areas of human futility and foolishness is the worship of idols. Paul will address that in the next part of our study in Romans.]

To find futility and foolishness of humanity from the annals of human history will not take long because they are found at every turn of the page. I spent years studying the history of multiple ancient civilizations in preparation for writing *A History of Man's Quest for Immortality* (Fifth Estate, 2007). What I found across the world's history was stark evidence of man's inhumanity to man. Jealousy and covetousness led to theft, slavery, strife, deceit, violence, physical and emotional domination, and murder. And for what? Nothing of any lasting value. As Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes –

“Vanity of vanities, all *is* vanity. What profit has a man from all his labor In which he toils under the sun? *One* generation passes away, and *another* generation comes; But the earth abides forever.”  
Ecclesiastes 1:2

## No Glory, No Thanks

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.” Romans 1:18-23

Paul makes many powerful points in his opening remarks to the church in Rome. The current context is God’s wrath revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

**Why?** “... who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

**Why?** “... because what may be known of God is manifest in them.”

**Why?** “... for God has shown it to them.”

**How?** "For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead."

**So?** "... so that they are without excuse."

**Why?** "... because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened."

### *Knowledge?*

Even though the descendants of the first human beings "knew God," they did not "glorify Him as God, nor were thankful." It's important to note here that the type of knowledge (γινώσκω) people had of God was not a "saving" knowledge. It is clear in the context that people "knew" God but did not glorify Him as God. They "knew" God but were not thankful to Him. That is still true today.

Think about that statement for a moment. They "knew" God but "did not" glorify Him as God. They "knew" God but were "not thankful" to Him. Knowing something as grand and glorious as the Creator God and refusing to give Him the glory due Him and not being thankful to Him for all He has created and given will lead a person to a very bad place. Why? Because it takes an action of the mind and heart to refuse to glorify and be thankful. Paul said that what they did was "suppress the truth in unrighteousness." The word "suppress" is κατέχω and means "hold down, hold fast, bind,

restrain." It's in the active voice, which means it is a choice that people make. Even they knew the "truth" (ἀλήθειαν), they chose to suppress it "in unrighteousness."

### *Wise or Foolish?*

That response to the knowledge of God they had within them led to their thoughts becoming "futile" and their foolish hearts "darkened." That is what we find with the first group of humans before the flood (Genesis 4-6) and the second group of humans after the flood (Genesis 7-11). Each group "knew" God, but did not glorify Him as God, were not thankful to God, and suppressed the truth in unrighteousness.

That is certainly an apt description of what we find in our human world today. It is the effect of **sin** on the mind and heart of every human being. How far did that effect go? We see in Paul's next words –

"Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things."

φασκοντες ειναι σοφοι εμωρανθησαν και ηλλαξαν την δοξαν του αφθαρτου θεου εν ομοιωματι εικονος φθαρτου ανθρωπου και πετεινων και τετραποδων και ερπετων

What a contrast – “professing to be wise, they became fools.” The word “professing” is a translation of the Greek word φάσκω and means “assert, affirm, profess.” The idea here is that people made their profession with confidence. Vincent comments that the verb is used of “unfounded assertion” (Marvin Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Volume III, 1887).

They asserted that they were “wise.” The Greek word is σοφοὶ. Aristotle viewed *sophia* as mental excellence in its highest and fullest sense (*Metaphysics*). That was a common idea in Greek philosophy during the time Paul was writing to the Romans. However, God views human wisdom as foolishness thinking that leads to foolish behavior – “they became fools.” The Hebrew word for “fool” is כֶּסֶל (*kesil*) and comes from the word קָסַל (*kasal*), which means “to be or become stupid.” Understanding how God viewed fools and foolishness in the Old Testament will help us understand how Paul used the terms in the New Testament. Here are a few examples of the use of *kesil* in the Old Testament. The first example clearly connects to Paul’s use of the word in Romans 1 –

“Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? *There is* more hope for a fool than for him.” Proverbs 26:12

“O Lord, how great are Your works! Your thoughts are very deep. A senseless man does not know, Nor does a fool understand this.”  
Psalm 92:5-6

"Understand, you senseless among the people; And *you* fools, when will you be wise? He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see? He who instructs the nations, shall He not correct, He who teaches man knowledge? The Lord knows the thoughts of man, That they *are* futile." Psalm 94:8-11

"How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorners delight in their scorning, And fools hate knowledge." Proverbs 1:22

"A wise son makes a glad father, But a foolish son *is* the grief of his mother." Proverbs 10:1

"To do evil *is* like sport to a fool, But a man of understanding has wisdom." Proverbs 10:23

"The wisdom of the prudent *is* to understand his way, But the folly of fools *is* deceit. Fools mock at sin, But among the upright *there is* favor." Proverbs 14:8-9

"The lips of the wise disperse knowledge, But the heart of the fool *does not do* so." Proverbs 15:7

The Greek word Paul used for "fool" is ἐμωράνθησαν – "they became fools." The primary verb, μωραίνω (*mórainó*) means "to taint, make foolish, make useless." It comes from the adjective μωρός (*móros*) – "stupid, foolish" – which is similar to the Hebrew word above. We get the English adjective "moronic" and the noun "moron" from the Greek word. It carried

the idea of being dull of understanding, nonsensical, lacking a grip on reality.

### *Change God's Glory?*

Paul was saying that even though people "professed" themselves to be wise, they were in fact "foolish" – dull of understanding, lacking a grip on what was real. God was real, but people didn't want to embrace real truth, so they became "fools." What that caused them to do was unthinkable, but it happened and continues to happen to this day –

"Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things."

They "changed the glory of the incorruptible God ..." That's a truly remarkable statement. How can mere human beings "change" the glory of the invisible, almighty, incorruptible God? The word "change" in Greek is ἀλλάσσω (*allassó*) and means "alter, exchange, transform." It's in the active voice, which means people did the exchanging.

Note the definition – **exchange**. That's the key to understanding what happened within the human race. People cannot "change" anything about God. Mortal, corruptible, time-limited human beings have no power to impact the immortal, incorruptible, eternal God in any way and they certainly can't "change" anything about Him. However, they can "exchange" the glory they owe Him for something else and that's what they did –

"... and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things."

Instead of worshipping the Creator, people worshiped the creature. That seems unthinkable, but it's true. It is a demonstration of how far the "fall" took the human race into the "sin nature." As we study the most ancient civilizations we find people worshiping images made like corruptible men and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. I have written about that in more detail in *A History of Man's Quest for Immortality*, so we'll look at just a few examples here.

### *Ancient Images*

As you search through books and websites about ancient gods and goddesses it becomes clear that people loved to worship themselves. So many of the images were of men and women, sometimes with wings, sometimes holding snakes. Some of the images had the body of a human, but the head of an animal or bird. Some had the upper body of a human and the lower body of an animal, fish, bird, etc. Many of the images were in the form of birds, four-footed animals and creeping things. That is how human beings who had been created in God's image and likeness chose to worship. They chose to worship the creature rather than the Creator.

Most of the ancient religions were polytheistic with scores, hundreds or even thousands of deities. Many had a hierarchy of gods that are referred to as the "pantheon" of gods. What do you see when you look at the "chief" gods of ancient religions?

- men
- women
- human heads on animal bodies
- animal heads on human bodies
- bird heads on human bodies
- human heads on bird bodies
- human heads on fish bodies
- human heads on dragon bodies
- bull heads on human bodies
- fish heads on human bodies
- snake heads on dragon bodies
- lion heads on dragon bodies
- lioness heads on human bodies
- baboon heads on human bodies
- jackal heads on human bodies
- demon heads (half man/half monster)
- dogs
- cats
- bulls
- cows
- monkeys
- baboons

- dragons
- fish
- crocodiles
- snakes

That's what people "exchanged" for worship of the true God – "... and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things."

How did the Almighty God respond to that action by His creatures? So far in our study we've seen several sets of powerful phrases that describe in great detail how God views the spiritual lostness and need of humanity. In the next part of our study in Romans we will see one of the most explosive statements in all the Bible – one that continues to rock our world.

## God Responds

“Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” Romans 1:22-25

We are looking carefully into the Apostle Paul’s words about the “wrath of God” that has been revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, “who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” In the last chapter we looked at how people who “knew” God did not glorify God as God, “nor were thankful.” They became “futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Even though people professed themselves to be wise, “they became fools.” They changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible people and birds, four-footed animals and creeping things.

How did God respond to their behavior?

“Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves.”

διο και παρεδωκεν αυτους ο θεος εν ταις επιθυμιαις των καρδιων αυτων εις ακαθαρσιαν του ατιμαζεσθαι τα σωματα αυτων εν εαυτοις

### *Actions Have Results*

People gave up God and glorified themselves and other created beings, so God gave people up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves. We'll get into specifics about how people did that, but first let's ask a question. When? When did God give people up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves?

"Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them." Genesis 3:21

God's response to Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden, after telling them how difficult and painful their lives would be, was to make tunics of skin and clothe them, then remove them from the garden so they wouldn't eat from the Tree of Life and live forever in their fallen condition. That doesn't sound like God gave them up to uncleanness to dishonor their bodies among themselves. Sounds like He was protecting and caring for them.

God's response to Cain's jealousy of his brother was to warn him. Again, God demonstrated His love and care for the first children born to the first parents. When Cain killed his brother, God sent Cain away as a fugitive and vagabond. Cain was despondent and worried that people would kill

him. God set a mark on Cain and said that "whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." (Genesis 4:15) Even though Cain acted terribly by killing his brother, God still protected Cain. It would seem that God had not yet given up people to uncleanness to dishonor their bodies among themselves.

Though the family of Cain took a dark turn (Genesis 4:16-24), a new opportunity arose when Eve gave birth to another son, Seth. Eve said – "For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed." Seth became father to Enosh and it was then that "*men* began to call on the name of the Lord." (Genesis 4:26) Again, it would appear that with people calling on God's "name" God had not yet given them up. So, when did He do that?

I think God gave people up somewhere in the timeframe of Genesis 5. Let me explain.

Enoch was the seventh generation from Adam through the line of Seth. Enoch became the father of Methuselah at the age of 65 and "walked with God" 300 years. "So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God; and he *was* not, for God took him." (Genesis 5:23-24) God "took" Enoch. What does that mean? We learn from the New Testament that it means Enoch did not die and people who searched for him did not find him.

“By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, ‘and was not found, because God had taken him’; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” Hebrews 11:5

Where did Enoch go? Good question. God took Enoch to Himself – possibly in a similar way that God took Elijah “into heaven by a whirlwind.” (2 Kings 2:11). Why did God “take” Enoch away so he would not see death? We know from Hebrews that Enoch had this testimony, “that he pleased God.” Genesis 5 says that Enoch “walked with God.” The Hebrew word הִלֵּךְ is translated “walked” in our English translations. The word means simply “to go.” The testimony of Genesis 5 and Hebrews 11 is that Enoch “walked” with God and in doing that “pleased God.” What a wonderful testimony for any of us to have in our relationship with God.

The genealogy of Adam through the line of Seth is interesting on several levels – both what is said and not said about each generation. Every generation included a father “begetting” a son, the father living for hundreds of years, having more sons and daughters, then finally dying. However, a few of the generations included more information that is insightful for us as we look for answers to when God “gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves.” Here is the additional information for us to observe from Genesis 5 –

“And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.”

It's important to note here that Adam begot a son "in his own likeness, after his image." God "created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." The importance is to see the connection the children of Adam and Eve have to God. Even as God created them in His "image" and "likeness," so the children Adam begot were in his "likeness, after his image." As Eve said, "For God has appointed another seed." Eve referred back to the promise of God that He would give her a Seed who would "bruise" (רָשַׁע – overwhelm) the head of the seed of the serpent (Satan). Eve was counting on God to give her the "seed" and she saw Him do that in Seth. Thus the importance of what Genesis 5 tells us about Seth.

"And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him."

We've already seen that Enoch pleased God as he "walked with God," so God took him.

"Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and had a son. And he called his name Noah, saying, 'This *one* will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed.'"

Lamech was the first-born son of Methuselah and grandson of Enoch. Lamech gave us an insight into what life was like after centuries of living outside the Garden of Eden. What God said to Adam in the Garden was still true in Lamech's lifetime –

"Cursed *is* the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat *of* it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you *are*, And to dust you shall return." Genesis 3:17-19

What Lamech said reminds me of something I heard my father say many times – "Life is hard and then you die."

However, an important prophetic insight we see in Lamech's comment is that his son Noah would "comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands." What did Lamech mean by that? He said that when he gave Noah his name, so there was something Lamech was thinking and possibly prophesying at that moment. It may have been prophetic about the eventual result of God saving the human race through Noah. Lamech may have been deeply troubled by the depravity of the human race and cried out in hope for God to bring some kind of resolution and comfort to them through Noah. He may have been troubled by the disappearance of his grandfather, Enoch, many years before. That's a theory since the Bible doesn't tell us Lamech's reason for saying what he did when naming Noah. What we do know is that Lamech saw in Noah some kind of "comfort" for them concerning the work and toil of their hands.

[On a side note, it's interesting to note that Lamech died at the age of 777. Lamech was 182 when Noah was born and died 595 years later. The Bible reads that "Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters were on

the earth." That means Lamech would have died about five years before the flood. The lifespan of other fathers in the lineage of Seth was about 900 years old or older. Lamech's death at 777 would have been earlier than the others by more than a century.]

As we look at the lineages of Cain and Seth we see something going terribly wrong. The human condition got worse and worse. As we understand the power of the "sin nature" we see how it permeates the mind, heart and will at an ever increasing pace. We see that in the framework of humans now who live for a hundred years or less. While there are some who have lived to be 105, 110, 115, 120, and even 122, those numbers don't compare with the descendants of Cain and Seth who lived for almost a thousand years. Can you imagine what it would be like to live with the sin nature raging and growing in your mind, heart and will for that long? No wonder the Bible describes people living prior to the Flood as "every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (Genesis 6:5) The sin nature can do that to a human being in much less time, so what must it have been like to have an entire human population living in that condition for hundreds and hundreds of years?

God may have taken Enoch early because He was in the process of giving up the human race "to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves" and wanted to remove Enoch from it. God may have done it for another reason. What we do know is that sometime prior to the Flood, God gave up the human race to their hearts' desire.

## *Giving Them Up*

So, what did Paul mean by writing that God "gave them up"? The Greek is παραδίδωμι αὐτός (*paradidómi autos*) and means "to hand over, to give or deliver over". The full meaning of the word is "to give into the hands of another, to give over into one's power or use." God gave people up to another power – the power of the sin nature. One Greek professor put it this way –

"Since men chose to give up God and worship the creature, God could do nothing but give men into the control of the sinful things they preferred to God. In other words, God would not violate man's will and force him to do something he did not want to do. When men persisted in following their totally depraved natures, God allowed them free rein. The natural result was immortality of the vilest kind." (*Word Studies in the Greek New Testament* Volume I, Dr. Kenneth Wuest, Eerdman's Publishing, 1955)

Wuest went on to quote Dr. Henry Alford in saying that God's act of delivering mankind over to the control of the depravity of the sin nature was "not merely permissive, but judicial, *God delivered them over.*"

The idea of God "judging" the human race through the process of "giving them up" is an interesting one. Here are some thoughts on that from others

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Adam Clarke wrote – ‘They had filled up the measure of their iniquities, and God, by permitting them to plunge into all manner of irregularities, thus, by one species of sin, inflicted punishment on another.’ (Clarke, Adam, 1832)

John Gill – “Not by putting any into them, but by leaving them to the pollution of their nature; by withdrawing his providential restraints from them, and by giving them up to judicial hardness.” (John Gill’s Exposition of the Whole Bible, 1748)

John Calvin – “As impiety is a hidden evil, lest they should still find an evasion, he shows, by a more palpable demonstration, that, they cannot escape, but must be held fast by a just condemnation, since such fruits have followed this impiety as cannot be viewed otherwise than manifest evidences of the Lord’s wrath. As the Lord’s wrath is always just, it follows, that what has exposed them to condemnation, must have preceded it. By these evidences then he now proves the apostasy and defection of men: for the Lord indeed does so punish those, who alienate themselves from his goodness, that he casts them headlong into various courses which lead to perdition and ruin. And by comparing the vices, of which they were guilty, with the impiety, of which he had before accused them, he shows that they suffered punishment through the just judgment of God: for since nothing is dearer to us than our own honor, it is extreme blindness, when we fear not to bring disgrace on ourselves; and it is the most suitable punishment for a reproach done to the Divine Majesty. This is the very thing which he treats of to the end of

the chapter; but he handles it in various ways, for the subject required ample illustration." (Calvin's Commentary on the Bible, 1540)

"The καί after διό may import, *As they advanced in departure from God, so God also on His part gave them up, &c.;—His dealings with them had a progression likewise. [παρέδωκεν] not merely permissive, but judicial: God delivered them over. As sin begets sin, and darkness of mind deeper darkness, grace gives place to judgment, and the divine wrath hardens men, and hurries them on to more fearful degrees of depravity.*" (Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary)

## To Uncleanness

“Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” Romans 1:22-25

In the last chapter we learned that actions have results. People gave up God and glorified themselves and other created beings, so God gave people **up**. Up to what? We’ll start unpacking that as we take a closer look at the Apostle Paul’s words about the “wrath of God” that has been revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, “who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

### *Handed Over*

God “handed over, delivered” humans **to uncleanness**. What does that mean?

διο και παρεδωκεν αυτους ο θεος εν ταις επιθυμιας των καρδιων αυτων εις ακαθαρσιαν του ατιμαζεσθαι τα σωματα αυτων εν εαυτοις

The literal of the first part of verse 24 reads – “Therefore gave up them God in the desires of the hearts of them to impurity”

"Therefore" (ὄτι) is important to note here. It is a conjunction that introduced God's response to what Paul wrote prior –

"... because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things."

God made a judicial decision to "hand over" people to "uncleanness." Why? Paul will make clear later in Romans that God did what He did to demonstrate mercy to those whom He wished to show mercy.

When a judge hands someone over for the purpose of punishment or retribution, it is often into the custody of a warden and guards of a prison. In the case of people who, though they knew God, did not glorify Him as God and were not thankful and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things, God "handed over" those people to "uncleanness." What kind of prison is that?

### *The Prison of Impurity*

The Greek word translated "uncleanness" is ἀκαθαρσίαν. It comes from the word ἀκάθαρτος and means "unclean, impure." It is a combination of the letter ἄλφα (understood as "no, not" when placed before a word)

and καθαρός (pure, unstained, innocent, unmixed, unadulterated, literally or spiritually clean). God gave people up to impurity because their nature was "mixed, adulterated, guilty." God placed people in the prison of impurity.

ἀκαθαρσία, ἀκαθαρσίας, and ἀκαθαρσίαῆ are used ten times in the New Testament –

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men's* bones and all uncleanness." Matthew 23:27

"Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves." Romans 1:24

"I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members *as* slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading to more* lawlessness, so now present your members *as* slaves of righteousness for holiness." Romans 6:19

"... lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced." 2 Corinthians 12:21

“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness ...” Galatians 5:19

“... who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” Ephesians 4:19

“But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints.” Ephesians 5:3

“Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” Colossians 3:5

“For our exhortation *did* not *come* from error or uncleanness, nor *was it* in deceit.” 1 Thessalonians 2:3

“For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.” 1 Thessalonians 4:7

And there you have the heart of the matter in Romans 1 – God called people to holiness, but they knowingly chose to suppress God’s “truth” and God gave them up to uncleanness:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” Romans 1:18

As we saw in an earlier study, people “changed the glory of the incorruptible God.” The word “change” in Greek is ἀλλάσσω and means “alter, exchange, transform.” It’s in the active voice, which means people did the exchanging. People “exchanged” the glory of God for “an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.” What did the Perfect, Supreme, Sovereign God do about that? He “gave them up to uncleanness,” to impurity.

### *Lusts of the Heart*

God gave people up to the custody of the prison of impurity. What kind of prison was that? What kind of punishment would be inflicted on people in that prison? Look back at the beginning of human sin for the answer –

“... but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Genesis 2:17

“ So when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.” Genesis 3:6

God sentenced people to fulfill the “desires” or “lusts” of their hearts. He sentenced them to do exactly what they wanted to do.

The Greek word used in Romans 1:24 is ἐπιθυμία and means “desire, eagerness for, inordinate desire, lust.” The word comes from ἐπιθυμέω, which means “long for, covet, lust after, set the heart upon, passionate longing.” God sentenced people to do what they coveted, what they passionately longed for, what their hearts were set upon, what was their primary focus. People had a “craving” for what was forbidden, what was unclean and impure. It’s hard to imagine that anyone made in the image of the pure God would have a craving for impurity, but that is the power of the sin nature.

The Greek word καρδιά is translated “heart” in Romans 1:24, but it means much more than the physical organ that pushes blood through your body. The word was also used for the “inner life, intention, the mind.” The strong, passionate longing of the inner life of a person, their deep intention, was “lust.” What was the result of that craving in the inner person?

### *Dishonoring Bodies*

“to dishonor their bodies among themselves”

The words “to dishonor” are a translation of ἀτιμάζεσθαι, which mean “disgrace, treat disgracefully, dishonor, insult, despise.” It comes from ἄτιμος – “without honor, despised.” God sentenced people to do what they craved most – dishonoring and despising their bodies and the bodies of others.”

God judged people and placed them in the custody of impurity. However, the custody would not be served in solitary confinement. People would live out their sentence by dishonoring their body with the bodies of other people – “among themselves.” The “lusts of their hearts” would include the lusts of other peoples’ hearts. Lusting people would live out their custody in the prison of impurity lusting after other lusting people.

The picture Paul will draw for us in the next several verses will be hard to look at for many reasons. Many of us will see our own custody and how we lived out our passionate lusts with others. Hopefully, it will be a picture of the past. We will also see our community, our nation, our world as it really is.

“Scripture taken from the New King James Version®.

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