

Romans 1v16-32

Introduction

Now the apostle Paul moves to his theme, which is to dominate much of the book. Having introduced himself and expressed his desire to preach the Gospel in Rome, he proudly and boldly announces that he is not ashamed of the power whereby God saves men from ruin and the curse of sin.

The need of men for the Gospel

One of the most damning indictments of human sin in the whole of the Bible.

Men **are without excuse** (1:20). God has revealed himself in the created world. Although he is invisible, they can see his handiwork. God's eternal power and the Godhead are made manifest. Creation is not the fullest revelation of God, but it shows his power and his mind and intelligence. Give an atheist a good dinner and ask him if he believes there was a cook.

Despite this revelation, **when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful** (1:21). Instead, men were filled with empty and dark thoughts. Despite pretence of wisdom, they were really fools, having turned to idolatry, worshipping a creature rather than the creator. Instead of being God-centred, they had become self-centred. The result was that grown men were so mentally perverted that they bowed before wooden and stone images of men, birds and animals. So much for their wisdom and intelligence.

The source of all sin is wrong ideas about God, wrong ideas about men, duty, and behaviour, all along the line. Therefore **the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of men.** (1:18).

Man's wrong relationships, and idolatry, are manifest in all sorts of vile and evil ways. These are all too common today, condoned and encouraged by government legislation. Unnatural vices, too distasteful to wax eloquent on here. Paul's own picture is perfectly restrained, because we know that in Paul's day there was unparalleled perversion and unparalleled immorality. Ancient society was riddled with unnatural vices. Fourteen out of fifteen Roman emperors were guilty of such vices. In our state today, such practices are applauded, condoned and legalised. Men and women are utterly unashamed of that which is an abomination to God.

Then a list of 21 things, including the worship of self, deliberate desire to corrupt and injure, greed, degeneracy, grudging, envy, murder, contention, deceit, character destroyers, slanderers, hating God, deliberately rejecting God, braggarts, deliberate desire to find new evil, disobedience to parents, fools, unfaithful to agreements, with only love for children and without respect for human life. After this appalling catalogue comes the final indictment. These people, though aware of judgement, deliberately do these things and take great pleasure in sinning. Encouraged, and aided and abetted by each other. The complete victory of evil over conscience. This is what happens when God is left out of men's lives, when minds are closed to his will and

commands. Therefore Paul demonstrates that the whole of humanity is morally bankrupt.

We are disgusted at this terrible accusation of human life. Yet we are all tarred by the same brush. Seeds of all these abominable things are in every heart. If in certain circumstances, certain temptations, born into certain homes, under certain influences, we could have been among the worst. Our hearts themselves are quite unlimited in their terrible possibilities. John Bradford, seeing a murderer carried off to die, said “There, but for the grace of God, go I”.

Do we stand outside this chapter? Do we dare to say that our hearts, under no change of circumstances, could develop the forms of evil branded here? As we know ourselves, is it not true that there lies in us indefinitely more than we can know of possible evil? The nearer we get to God, we see and realize what, but for God, we would be.

Wrath of God on men’s sins

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness (1:18). The Greek word *κατεχοντων* used here for “suppress” means hold down, deliberately reject the truth they know. They stifle the truth. Solemn and awful truth about God’s holy reaction to sin.

People’s reaction to this idea – they confuse God’s wrath with human wrath. God does not act with impatience, haste, bad temper – which is the passion of human wrath. God’s wrath is the wrath of one who can never be untrue to himself. God is love. He is also light. He is a consuming fire. It is a fearful thing to fall into his hands. Cannot be watered down to mean impersonal process of cause and effect, whereby if we sin we suffer for it and have to pay for it. God’s wrath is as personal and as real as God’s love. His holiness responds to ungodliness and unrighteousness. Luther described this as “God’s strange work”. Christ gave most formidable warnings. Two ways in life, and two ends in death. Heaven is real, and so is hell.

We will never understand the real nature of salvation and understand the extent of our indebtedness to the love of God, unless we see it against the awful background of sin, guilt, wrath, punishment and finally hell.

The passage mainly refers to God’s wrath at the end times. Yet God’s wrath is already at work. Three times (v24, 26, 28) it says “**God gave them up..**”. When, despite his warnings and pleadings, men insist on going their own way, God gives them up to their sins. He takes the brakes off, and lets them have their own way. They begin to reap in this life the harvest they have sown. It is a dire thought, but inmost conscience, once awake, affirms the righteousness of the thing.

C.S.Lewis wrote “The lost enjoy forever the terrible freedom they have demanded and are therefore self-enslaved. To those who object to hell, what do you want God to do? Wipe out past sins at all costs and give them a fresh start... offering every miraculous help? But he has already done so, on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. To leave them alone? Alas I am afraid that is what he does”

Christ, the Power of God to Save

We cannot appreciate this tremendous affirmation unless we keep in mind the background of sin and wrath. Man and his need must be exposed first before the relevance and beauty of the Gospel can be seen. “The Gospel can never be proved except to a bad (awakened) conscience”. With conscience sound asleep – we can discuss, condemn, applaud the Gospel, but never act on it. We need to know our sin and feel its weight, experience its condemnation and bondage before Christ becomes meaningful and desirable.

Into this dreadful and appalling situation comes the Gospel of Christ – that Christ died for men’s sins and rose again. The source is the power of God himself. Here is no human advice or manmade programme for human improvement. The source is divine power. The purpose is for salvation. It delivers us from sin’s curse and bondage. Forgiveness and deliverance are ours.

This Gospel is for everyone, **to the Jew first and also to the Greek** (1:16). There is worldwide need, and God has made worldwide provision. Salvation is for everyone at every time in every place, for every sin and under every circumstance. Idolaters, those who practice unnatural vices, murderers, crooked people, slanderers, those who disobey parents, those who do not keep their word, those with no mercy or pity, and those who aid and abet others in their sins – The Gospel is for them all.

How does it save? In place of the sinner’s awful sin is Christ’s perfect righteousness, put to their account. God sees them actually as righteous, perfectly righteous. He sees people in Christ. There takes place a glorious transfer of sin to the Saviour, and of righteousness to the sinner.

How is it received? What is there to pay? How good do we have to be? What achievements are necessary? **It is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth** (1:16), who rests on the One who made atonement and receives his grace, who has acknowledged their own inability, and Christ’s ability. It requires an acknowledgement of one’s own helplessness, failure, and weakness, together with an acknowledgement of his fullness, sufficiency, and power to save. It has been described as the opening of dying lips to receive water of life. **Therein is the righteous ness of God revealed from faith to faith** (1:17). It begins with faith, continues with faith, and ends by faith. Living a life of faith means taking Christ, holding Christ, using Christ, leaning on Christ – by faith.

No wonder Paul could say **I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ** (1:16). No need to blush about God’s power, no need to blush about the divine dynamic rescuing men from sin, hell, transforming characters, the only answer to man’s greatest problem in this world and destiny in the next. No need to be ashamed of the power that can take a man on the dunghill and place him as a prince on a throne. To have the Gospel, which is the only secret of true life in relation to past, present and future, is to be filled with courage and boldness.

Paul was using Christ’s words **Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed** (Luke 9:26).

**Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord (2 Timothy 1:8).
Nevertheless I am not ashamed for I know whom I have believed and am
persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against
that day (2 Timothy 1:12).**