

# THE BAD NEWS OF THE GOOD NEWS

## ROMANS 1:18

### INTRODUCTION

In the previous verses of **Romans 1:16–17**, Paul declared his **enthusiasm for the gospel** by describing the good news in two ways—

The gospel is **the power of God in salvation**, and more specifically, it is **the righteousness of God in justification**.

As we studied the text this past Sunday, we learnt that the “**righteousness of God**” Paul wrote of in **verse 17** is not His righteous character, but **His righteous way of putting sinners right with Himself**.<sup>1</sup>

By declaring his enthusiasm for the gospel in this way, Paul also **introduced the thesis** of his letter to the Romans.

Paul’s main idea in Romans is that **the gospel is the righteousness of God by faith**.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the good news is about, “*God’s righteous way of ‘righteousing’ the unrighteous.*”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 70.

<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *Introducing the New Testament: A Short Guide to Its History and Message* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 81.

<sup>3</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 37.

As we put it last week, **the heart of the gospel is justification by faith.**<sup>4</sup>

That is God's righteous way of **putting sinners right with Himself** through faith alone.

This is what makes the gospel "good news."

But as we've previously noted in our series, the good news of the gospel **presupposes corresponding bad news.**<sup>5</sup>

In our overview of Romans, we learnt that the bad news is **very bad news for us for two reasons:**

1. because of who God is and
2. because of who we are.

God is the holy Creator who owns us and cannot simply overlook sin,

and we are sinners whom God must justly condemn for our rebellion against Him.

As we will see today, that outline of the bad news **matches Paul's statement** in **verse 18.**

With **verse 18,** Paul **opens the body of his letter** and begins with a statement summarising the next section that runs from **verse 18 to the end of the chapter in verse 32.**

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 28.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Andrew David Naselli, *Romans: A Concise Guide to the Greatest Letter Ever Written* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 24.

**However**, the statement in **verse 18** is connected to the preceding verses as Paul **draws an inference** from **verses 16–17**.

In fact, if you look at **these three verses** you can see how **important the word “for”** is in Paul's argument.

He uses this conjunction to add further explanation every time.

**First**, at the **beginning of verse 16**, Paul explains his eagerness to preach the gospel—because he is enthusiastic about the gospel.

**Second**, later in **verse 16**, Paul explains why he is enthusiastic about the gospel—because it is the power of God for salvation.

**Third**, in **verse 17**, Paul explains why the good news is the power of God—because it reveals the righteousness of God by faith.

**Fourth**, in **verse 18**, Paul relates the revelation of God's righteousness to the revelation of His wrath as he **explains why the righteousness of God by faith is necessary**.

To put that simply, in **verse 18** Paul explains **why the gospel is necessary**; he explains why we need the good news of God's righteousness—because of the bad news of God's wrath.

Paul explains that **sin has gained a stranglehold** on all people that only the saving power of God—experienced as the gift of righteousness received through faith—can break.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Carson and Moo, *Introducing the New Testament*, 81.

As we said, **verse 18** begins the body of Paul's letter and does so by **summarising Paul's argument** in the next section.

This next section, though, is **part of a larger argument** that Paul is making.

**From verse 18 to chapter 3, verse 20** Paul describes the **universal need for God's righteousness**.

In short, we all need **God's saving righteousness** because we are all unrighteous and thus deserve **God's judging righteousness**—His wrath.<sup>7</sup>

Paul supports that big point with **three sub-points**:

**First**, Paul argues that the **Gentiles are unrighteous**, as we see in this section from **1:18–32**.

**Second**, he argues that **Jews too are unrighteous**, as we see in the next section from **2:1–3:8**.

**Third**, on the basis of the first two points, Paul argues that **all humans are unrighteous**, as we see in the section from **3:9–20**.

**This universal need for God's righteousness** is the bad news that is presupposed by the good news of the gospel.

**It explains why we need the gospel**; why we need the good news of justification through faith.

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<sup>7</sup> Naselli, *Romans*, 29.

This first big point that Paul makes is then, unsurprisingly, the **foundation for his next big point—the means of obtaining God's righteousness.**

Paul spends the section from **3:21 to the end of chapter 4, in verse 25**, arguing with **faith alone in Jesus** is how God will declare us righteous.

It is this section in which **Paul explains in detail** what he stated in **Romans 1:17**, that God's righteous way of putting sinners right with Himself is justification by faith alone.

With that said, we can now **easily understand the flow of Paul's argument** and why he begins the body of the greatest letter ever written by **focusing on the worst news that anyone will ever hear.**

The worst news that you, or anyone, can ever hear is that **without Christ you are under the condemnation of God.**

**The bad news of the good news** is that without the righteousness of God, you are under the wrath of God.

As we will see today then, it is essential to **understand and acknowledge** God's righteous wrath against sin in order to **understand and accept** God's righteous justification of sinners.

In the words of **one author**—

*“Attempts to tone down the wrath of God are powerless in the face of the strong and frequent biblical words of threat and judgment.*

*Only when we recognise this and proclaim the turning aside of God’s wrath as an astounding and gracious reality are we able, the better, to listen to the central message of the Gospel: the real forgiveness of our sins.”<sup>8</sup>*

As we stated, the bad news of the good news is that without the righteousness of God, **you are under the wrath of God.**

However, without the understanding and acknowledgement of the bad news, you are not able to understand and accept the good news.

**Only by fully understanding the bad news can we fully appreciate the good news.**<sup>9</sup>

As **one commentator** wrote—

*“We can only appreciate the aspect of his righteousness that leads to the salvation of everyone who believes if we also appreciate the aspect of his righteousness that leads to the condemnation of everyone who sins.”<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> G. C. Berkouwer cited in S. Lewis Johnson Jr., “Paul and the Knowledge of God,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (1972): 65.

<sup>9</sup> Moo, *Romans*, NIVAC, 59.

<sup>10</sup> Frank Thielman, *Romans*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 96.

## PROPOSITION

**Now then**, let's turn our attention to the details of our text as we study **verse 18**.

In **verse 18**, Paul **introduces the bad news** that explains the need for the good news with **two introductory remarks**:

1. God's response to human rebellion
2. Man's response to divine revelation

### 1. GOD'S RESPONSE TO HUMAN REBELLION

As we look at our text, Paul **introduces the theme of his argument**—the wrath of God.

His statement here in **verse 18** then **both introduces and summarises** what is to come in this section.

This is the bad news that explains our need for the good news of the gospel, as **F. F. Bruce** captures well in his **paraphrase of the verse**—

*“The necessity of such a way of righteousness will appear when we consider how plainly God's wrath is revealed from heaven against every form of impiety and unrighteousness practised by men who unrighteously suppress the truth.”<sup>11</sup>*

**So then**, what Paul begins to explain here is **God's response to man's sin**.

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<sup>11</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Letters of Paul: An Expanded Paraphrase* (Nashville, TN; Bath, England: Kingsley Books, 2017), Ro 1:18–32.

This is God's response to human rebellion.

God's response to human rebellion is His wrath.

**So then**, what is “**the wrath of God**” as Paul refers to it here in verse 18?

**By its simplest definition**, God’s wrath means that **He intensely hates all sin**.<sup>12</sup>

To give us a fuller idea, **Alan Cairns** offers the following definition—

*“The wrath of God’... describes the settled opposition of God’s nature against evil, His holy displeasure against sinners, and the punishment He justly metes out to them on account of their sins.”*<sup>13</sup>

This definition It is very helpful to us as it **clarifies four points**:

**First**, the wrath of God is **not like the anger of man**.

Paul's word choice, using the **Greek word ὀργή**,<sup>14</sup> indicates that he is referring to **God’s settled, determined indignation**, not to the momentary, emotional, and often uncontrolled anger of man.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 245.

<sup>13</sup> Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Belfast; Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 529.

<sup>14</sup> “Strong indignation directed at wrongdoing, w. focus on retribution.” BDAG, ὀργή.

<sup>15</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Romans*, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 60.

In the words of **one commentator**—

*“The wrath of God is not angry passion, but the condemnation which falls upon sin and sinners in conscious rebellion against God.”*<sup>16</sup>

**Second**, the wrath of God **arises out of God’s nature or character**.

**Because God is righteous and good**, he must hate everything that is opposed to His righteous character.

If God loves **all that is right and good and all that conforms** to his moral character, then it should not be surprising that he would hate everything that is opposed to his moral character.<sup>17</sup>

As **one author** commented—

*“As long as God is God, He cannot behold with indifference that His creation is destroyed and His holy will trodden underfoot. Therefore He meets sin with His mighty and annihilating reaction.”*<sup>18</sup>

**Third**, the wrath of God is **directed towards both sin and the sinners who commit the sin**.

It is common in our day to hear the saying, “God hates the sin but loves the sinner.”

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<sup>16</sup> Vincent Taylor cited in Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 201.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 245.

<sup>18</sup> Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949), 98.

However, we find that idea to be **completely foreign to Scripture and wholly incompatible** with Paul's argument here in **Romans 1**.

So the wrath of God is then **His manifest anger and displeasure** toward both sin and those who commit it.<sup>19</sup>

**Fourth**, the wrath of God includes **His active punishment of sin**.

So then, as Paul describes it here in **Romans 1:18**, God **intensely hates sin and intends to punish it** fully in response.<sup>20</sup>

As we continue in both this sermon and the following ones of this section, we'll see what Paul means by God's righteous and wrathful punishment of sin.

So again, **Alan Cairns'** definition is very helpful in clarifying—  
*“The wrath of God’... describes the settled opposition of God’s nature against evil, His holy displeasure against sinners, and the punishment He justly metes out to them on account of their sins.”*

Or as we put it simply, **God’s wrath means that He intensely hates all sin**.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, *Romans*, vol. 6, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 477.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Gregg R. Allison, “Wrath,” in *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 226.  
See also, John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 939.

As we look at **verse 18** again, you'll see that Paul describes **God's response to human rebellion** further when he writes—  
**For the wrath of God is revealed...**

What does it mean for God's wrath to be “**revealed**”?

**The basic sense of the word** means, “*to reveal, to disclose, to make fully known.*”<sup>21</sup>

Based on the context, **some have suggested** that this revelation is part of the gospel message, so that the good news includes the announcement of bad news.

However, while the best way to proclaim the gospel is to communicate the bad news in order to effectively communicate the necessity of the good news, it's clear that **Paul means something else** by the “**revelation**” of **verse 18**.

**The gospel message is not revealed to all**, but Paul states explicitly that God's wrath is revealed against all sin.

So this revelation may **explain the need for the gospel**, but it is **not the same revelation** that Paul is referring to in **verse 17**.

**Others have suggested** that this is a future event—the final judgement of God.

Paul does indeed refer to this **future wrath** in **Romans 2:5**—

**Because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.**

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<sup>21</sup> Louw & Nida, ἀποκαλύπτω.

Once more, a **careful consideration of the context** makes it clear that Paul is referring to the **present reality of God's wrath against sin.**

In fact, Paul chooses to use the **present tense form** of the word “**is revealed**” to stress that God's wrath is constantly revealed.

So Paul is stressing the active working and present effects of God's wrath.

In other words, Paul is describing the present reality of all people who are outside Christ.

Now, if we cast our eye over the following verses, we'll see that Paul clarifies exactly how God is actively working to reveal His wrath.

Paul's argument unfolds as follows—

In verses 19–23, Paul explains WHY God is responding in wrath.

Then in verses 24–32, Paul explains HOW God is responding in wrath.

Looking then at verses 24–32, there is a clear threefold repetition of the phrase, “**God gave them over...**”

**Look** at **verse 24**—**Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonoured among them.**

**Verse 26**— For this reason **God gave them over to dishonourable passions...**

**Verse 28**— And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, **God gave them over to an unfit mind, to do those things which are not proper**

So Paul is arguing that the wrath of God is now visible in His **“handing over”** of human beings **to their chosen way of sin and all its consequences.**<sup>22</sup>

This doesn't refer to **something indirect or passive.**

**Paul is not merely arguing** that people experience the natural consequences of violating God's universal moral law.

This is not what **one commentator** described as, *“the inherent tendency of moral evil to produce misery.”*<sup>23</sup>

This refers to **something direct and active.**

Paul is arguing that people are experiencing the wrath of God **through His personal intervention** of allowing humanity to **plumb the depths of its depravity** and experience all that follows.

As we consider this reality in light of what we see in our culture and the world, we should conclude as **one author** did that, *“The world's history is the world's judgment.”*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Moo, *Romans*, 112

<sup>23</sup> Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Romans* (Edinburgh and Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> Friedrich von Schiller, cited in Johnson, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 66.

That is, God is **not an idle spectator of world events**<sup>25</sup>—  
He is active in human affairs, and that activity is either the saving power of God, or the condemning wrath of God.

As the preacher **S. Lewis Johnson** pointed out—

*“This fundamental principle lies at the base of the critical condition of [society].... It has neglected the truth and is reaping the harvest of the product, violence, crime, and immorality of the lowdest type.”*<sup>26</sup>

At this point, as we consider how God's wrath is revealed, it is worth noting that God has **various kinds of wrath**.

**John MacArthur** lists **five kinds of the wrath of God**<sup>27</sup>

- I. **Eternal wrath**, which is never-ending, conscious torment of hell.
- II. **Eschatological wrath**, which is the final Day of the Lord which comes at the consumption of human history.
- III. **Cataclysmic wrath** like the flood in Noah's day, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah
- IV. **Consequential wrath**, which is the principle of sowing and reaping that we find in **Galatians 6:7**. This is the simple the law of moral cause and effect work.
- V. **The wrath of abandonment**, which is God removing His gracious restraint and letting people go to their sins.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Geoffrey B. Wilson, *New Testament Commentary: Volume One, Romans—Ephesians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2020), 13.

<sup>26</sup> Johnson, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 66.

<sup>27</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), Ro 1:18.

As we have already established, **Paul is particularly focused on that last kind**— God's wrath expressed by **abandoning people to their depravity** as He gives them over to their sin.

This is the wrath the people without Christ—people without the gift of God's righteousness that is received by faith—are **presently experiencing**.

Of course, that in no way denies **certainty of God's wrath** poured out in **future judgement**.

In fact, the present experience of God's wrath should warn everyone of the **certainty of the coming eschatological and eternal** wrath of God.

Of this, Paul writes in **1 Thessalonians 1:10** that Jesus, **“rescues us from the wrath to come.”**

**The purpose of the bad news, then, is to lead you to the good news.**

Paul describes **the worst news that you will ever hear** in order to lead you to the best news you will ever receive—the gospel.

**Now**, Paul is not done yet describing **God's response to human rebellion** as he writes in **verse 18** that, **“the wrath of God is revealed from heaven....”**

What does Paul mean that God's response to sin comes **“from heaven”**?

To begin with, these words **do not imply any extraordinary mode of communication.**

This revelation comes **through the ordinary means of removing the restraint** on people's sin and letting them experience the **miserable consequences** thereof.

It is perhaps because God's wrath is not revealed in an extraordinary manner that men and woman continue to deny the reality of God's judgement and reject the warning that ought to lead them to repentance and faith in Christ.

Further, we can say that since God dwells in heaven, **this is the source** of everything He does to **display His character and purposes.**<sup>28</sup>

So then, heaven reveals “*the majesty of an angry God.*”<sup>29</sup>

Finally, this simple phrase communicates that **nothing will escape God's just response** to sin since nothing happens without His knowledge—**nothing is hidden from His sight.**

Therefore, God will respond in wrath against all human rebellion—**He will justly punish every sin.**

As **one author** put it, “*Whatever is under heaven, and yet not under the Gospel, is under this wrath.*”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Hodge, *Romans*, 52.

<sup>29</sup> Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, ed. M. Ernest Bengel and J. C. F. Steudel, trans. James Bryce, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1860), 18.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

**So then**, as we **zoom out from the details** to consider **God's response to human rebellion**, it's clear that Paul is describing bad news.

**This is the worst news that anyone will ever hear.**

The worst news that you, or anyone, can ever hear is that without **without the righteousness of God through faith** you are under the condemnation of God.

**God is angry towards sin** and He responds with righteous wrath in the **present punishment of abandonment**.

God abandons stubborn sinners to their **sinful self-centredness** and we should view the result of their **moral and spiritual degeneration** as an act of God's judgement.<sup>31</sup>

This is the bad news of the good news—this is the bad news that **explains the necessity of the gospel**.

Previously we articulated this as **the “bad news” of who God is**—God is the holy Creator who owns us and cannot simply overlook sin.

**That is Paul's first point**, that the holiness of God stirs Him to respond to human rebellion with His wrath.

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Stott, *Romans*, 75.

## 2. MAN'S RESPONSE TO DIVINE REVELATION

**In his second introductory remark**, Paul explains God's response to human rebellion by describing **man's response to divine revelation**.

That's what he's describing the **remainder of verse 18**—

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

With the words, “**all ungodliness and unrighteousness**,” Paul is referring to the **objects of God's wrath**.

God **responds to every sin and rebellion** with righteous judgement.

There are **no exceptions** and there is no category of sin that does not stir the anger and punishment of God.

In other words, there are no “**respectable sins**,” as **Jerry Bridges** calls them.<sup>32</sup>

He uses that term to refer to the **subtle, often overlooked sins** that have become **socially acceptable within the church**.

Sins like—**anxiety, frustration, discontentment, pride, selfishness, lack of self-control, impatience and irritability, envy and jealousy**.

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<sup>32</sup> Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2007).

As Paul states here, there are attitudes and behaviours that **seem minor to us but are still offensive to God.**

**God is opposed to all sin and displeased by all human rebellion.**

So as Paul explains, God's wrath is **active against the objects of “all ungodliness and unrighteousness.”**

Man expresses his sinful rebellion against God in **“ungodliness and unrighteousness.”**

**Now**, even though Paul is using two terms, **he is describing one concept.**

**Greek grammar, like English grammar**, allows for this, but we can see that this is clearly Paul's intention when he uses only a single term at the end of the verse as a **shorthand for both.**

Using two names for the same thing then **gives a fuller, or more rounded description** than a single name would by itself.<sup>33</sup>

**To consider each term separately for a moment, the first term, “ungodliness,”** in general is *“understood vertically as a lack of reverence for deity.”*<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> “The combination of these two rather synonymous nouns is probably best understood as a *hendiadys* that functions in a forceful manner to signal the whole gamut of human rebellion, lawlessness, and sin—all of which, however defined, is under God's rightful judgment.” Longenecker, *Romans*, NIGCGT, 204.

<sup>34</sup> BDAG, ἀσεβεία.

It means “to live in a manner contrary to proper religious beliefs and practice.”<sup>35</sup>

**The second term, “unrighteousness,”** refers to acts, “that violate standards of right conduct.”<sup>36</sup>

That is, it describes “an activity which is unjust.”<sup>37</sup>

As **one commentator insightfully noted**—

“[‘Ungodliness’ focuses] attention on the fact that **all sin is an attack on the majesty of God**, [‘unrighteousness’] on the fact that it is **a violation of God’s just order**.”<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, we can think of “**ungodliness**” as **illustrated by idolatry**, and “**unrighteousness**” as **illustrated by immorality**.<sup>39</sup>

To think of the terms together then, **S. Lewis Johnson** aptly comments that they “express the basic truth that immorality in life proceeds from apostasy in doctrine.”<sup>40</sup>

To put that another way, **when you do not fear God you will not live faithfully before God.**

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<sup>35</sup> Louw & Nida, ἀσέβεια.

<sup>36</sup> BDAG, ἀδικία.

<sup>37</sup> Louw & Nida, ἀδικία.

<sup>38</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 112.

<sup>39</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 36.

<sup>40</sup> Johnson, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 66.

Or simply, when you **do not think rightly about God then you will not live rightly for God.**

That is the fuller description of man's that Paul offers.

It is clear to understand, then, **why sin is so offensive to God** and why **demands his wrathful response.**

**At the heart of all sin** is not just a rejection of God's ways, but a rejection of God Himself.

In his depravity, man not only **rebels against the rules of God**, but he **rebels against the reign of God** over his life.

As Paul continues in **verse 18**, he further describes **the human rebellion of sin** by explaining that it is **produced by man's response to divine revelation**—

**... all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness**

What does it mean to “**suppress the truth in unrighteousness**”?

In this context, the word “**suppress**” carries the meaning of **holding something down**.<sup>41</sup>

As **one scholar** put it, “*Truth... is out in the open, but wicked men, so to speak, put it in a box and sit on the lid.*”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> BDAG, κατέγω.

<sup>42</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Ro 1:18.

The word carries the nuance of **hindering or repressing** the truth.<sup>43</sup>

**In short**, man's response to God's revelation is to **oppose and reject the truth**.

But what exactly is Paul mean by, "**the truth**" here?

**The actual term** has a **more comprehensive sense** than our understanding of the word 'truth.'

It refers both to **what is right, as well as what is true**, so that we can think of it as the **opposite of unrighteousness**.<sup>44</sup>

We find an example of this **truth that carries implications for right conduct** in **Romans 2:8** as Paul writes of,

**... those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and anger.**

From the context, Paul clearly has the **truth about who God is** in mind as **the core of the "truth" men reject**.

In **verse 25** we read, "**They exchanged the truth of God** [that is, the truth about God] **for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator....**"

So Paul means that **man responds to the revelation** of what is true and right with **a rebellious rejection of God and what He requires of man**.

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 15.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Hodge, *Romans*, 53.

We see a similar statement in **Psalm 14:1**—

**The wicked fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They act corruptly, they commit abominable deeds; There is no one who does good.**

**Jesus Himself** referred to man's response to divine revelation using the **analogy of light and darkness** in **John 3:19-20**—

**<sup>19</sup> This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.**

**<sup>20</sup> For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light lest his deeds be exposed.**

So as Paul remarks, man opposes the truth about God because he **realises that God will hold him accountable** for the **sins he loves and does not want to give up.**<sup>45</sup>

**Now to be clear,** Paul is not referring to man **rejecting the truth of the gospel**—though many who hear the good news certainly do.

Here Paul is referring to God's wrathful response against the **sin of all men who reject the truth about God** which is **available to everyone.**

Paul clarifies what he has in mind **two verses later, in verse 20**—

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

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. MacArthur, *Romans*, 68.

People are guilty because they **sin against the truth they have**, not the truth they do not have, and since not all have the truth of the gospel, Paul must mean **something more general**.<sup>46</sup>

So then, this “**truth**” in **verse 18** is what theologians call **natural or general revelation**.

By calling this revelation “**natural**,” we mean that this kind of revelation is available “*through the natural order of created and preserved things in our universe.*”<sup>47</sup>

In other words, **the facts of the universe** reveal something about God.

As **Psalm 19:1** says, “**The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and the expanse is declaring the work of His hands.**”

By calling this revelation “**general**,” we mean that this sort of revelation is available to people living at **any time, place, and culture in human history**.

So Paul is referring to this natural, or general, revelation by which God reveals the **truth about who He is and what He requires of man**.

**God reveals Himself through His creation.**

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Morris, *Romans*, 78.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. John S. Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place: The Doctrine of Scripture*, ed. John S. Feinberg, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 47.

As **C.S. Lewis** said, “We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him.”<sup>48</sup>

It is this revealed truth, this divine revelation, to which **man responds with rebellious opposition** that **produces every kind of sin.**

So as Paul **introduces his theme for the next section**, he argues that the wrath of God is directed against all those who **deliberately suppress** what they know to be true and right, **in order to go their own way.**<sup>49</sup>

**If you look back** at **verse 18**, Paul concludes these opening remarks by **stating that man resists the truth of God, “in unrighteousness.”**

This is the **same term** he used earlier, and as we noted then, we should understand it to be a **shorthand reference** to the concept of man’s sin that Paul described earlier as the **“ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.”**

**So the very instrument** by which man opposes the truth is his rebellion against **both the reign and rules of God.**

**As man rejects God Himself**, he then rejects God's ways and as a consequence continues to reject the truth about God, which then produces further sinful rebellion against God.

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<sup>48</sup> C.S. Lewis, cited in Joe Rigney, “With One Voice: Scripture and Nature for Ethics and Discipleship,” *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 1, no. 1 (2019): 29.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Stott, *Romans*, 37.

**This may sound like a circular argument**, but as Paul brings his remark full circle he's actually **making a profound point**.

**Contrary to the lofty pride of man** that we see expressed in the words of **atheists, agnostics, and those who reject the gospel** of Jesus Christ on supposed 'intellectual grounds,'

Paul is implying that man **does not begin with moral neutrality** towards the truth.

Though many claim to consider God's revelation with **impartiality**, the clear implication of Paul's words is that no one thinks about God or responds to God **from a position of neutrality**.

**Man's natural depravity** is demonstrated by **his sinful bias against God's revelation** of Himself in His creation.

David admits that human beings are deprived from the **earliest point of their existence—their conception**—as he writes in **Psalm 51:5**—

**Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.**

That is why, **without the saving power of God to intervene**, every man, woman, and child constantly opposes and suppresses the truth which God makes plain through His creation.

Therefore, **the sinful bias of human depravity** means that **no one worships or serves God through natural revelation**.

It also means that the **experience of God's present wrath** as He gives people over **is insufficient** to bring anyone to an acceptance of the truth and the godly, righteous life that God requires.

**This second remark explains Paul's first remark.**

**As we zoom out again** from the details to consider **man's response to divine revelation**, we see that it clarifies God's response to man's rebellion.

Once again, this is bad news—specifically, **the bad news of who we are.**

Just as Paul's first remark corresponded to the bad news of who God is, so his second remark corresponds to the bad news of who we are.

In fact, **who God is** is only “bad news” **because of who we are.**

God is the holy Creator who owns us and cannot simply overlook sin, but we are sinners whom God must justly condemn for our rebellion against Him.

That is what Paul has described in **his remark on man's response** to divine revelation.

God reveals Himself to people living at **every time, place, and culture** in human history.

Because of their depravity, **every one of them responds by rejecting the truth of God** which **produces a life of sinful rebellion.**

Paul describes this rebellion as “**ungodliness and unrighteousness.**”

That is, **when you don't think rightly about God then you will not live rightly for God.**

That is precisely **why we need the good news of the gospel.**

The bad news is that, **without the intervention of God's saving power**, we are **hopelessly enslaved to sin** and therefore under the just condemnation of God.

Without the righteousness of God through faith, we are under the wrath of God which we experience in the present as He gives us over to our sin.

Without Christ, though, the present wrath is but **the smallest foretaste** of the **future, final wrath of God** that we will experience in eternal judgement.

## CONCLUSION

**To conclude**, we've have learnt today that the good news of the gospel **presupposes corresponding bad news.**

The bad news is **explained with two points**—

**First**, as we consider God's response to human rebellion, the bad news is explained by who God is.

**Second**, as we consider man's response to divine revelation, the bad news is further explained who we are.

**Without the gospel, the bad news of the good news is the worst news that anyone will ever hear.**

The worst news that you, or anyone, can ever hear is that without **without the righteousness of God through faith** you are under the condemnation of God.

However, **the purpose of the bad news** is to explain that the good news is **the greatest message ever proclaimed** because it announces the greatest plan of salvation ever conceived.

As Paul's introduction to his theme of God's wrath explains, **we cannot save ourselves** and are absolutely dependent upon the **intervention of God's saving power** to overcome our natural depravity and **produce in us the faith** by which He will justify us.

That is, the faith by which He will **righteously put us right with Himself.**

## **So then, what are you to do with the bad news of the good news?**

The purpose of the bad news is to bring you to the good news, **so if you are outside of Christ**, if you do not have the righteousness of God through faith, then the wrath of God **should terrify you.**

**For you**, the bad news is a **call to repentance and faith** in Christ according to the good news of the gospel.

**If you are in Christ**, if you have been justified by God through faith, then the wrath of God should **make you grateful and faithful.**

**For you**, the bad news is a reminder of all that you should be grateful for as God has saved you from the worst news.

The bad news, then, is the **backdrop** against which you see the glory of the good news and praise God for it.

**For you**, the bad news is also a **motivation to mature** in the **obedience of faith** as you continually turn from the sin that displeases God in order to live a life that pleases Him.

The bad news, then, is the **backdrop** for your spiritual service of worship.

Like Paul, let us all be **enthusiastic for the gospel**—the greatest message ever proclaimed—and **all the more so as we understand the bad news of the good news.**

## BENEDICTION

**Jude 1:24-25**—

<sup>24</sup> **Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,  
and to make you stand in the presence of His glory  
blameless with great joy,  
<sup>25</sup> to the only God our Saviour,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
be glory, majesty, might, and authority,  
before all time and now and forever.  
Amen.**

Romans 1:18b–18c LSB

1:18

b

c

d

For the wrath of God is revealed

← from heaven

against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men

who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

| Reason we need 17a

| Source of 18a

| Object of 18a

| Describes 18c

1:18  
b  
c  
d  
1:19  
b  
1:20  
b  
c  
d  
e  
f  
1:21  
b  
c  
d  
e  
1:22  
b  
1:23  
b  
c  
d  
e  
1:24  
b  
c  
d  
1:25  
b  
c  
d  
1:26  
b  
c  
d  
1:27  
b  
c  
d  
1:28  
b  
c  
d  
1:29  
b  
c  
d  
e  
f  
g  
h  
i  
j  
1:30  
b  
c  
d  
e  
f  
g  
1:31  
b  
c  
d  
1:32  
b  
c  
d

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

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

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

Professing to be wise,  
 they became fools,  
 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God  
 for an image in the likeness of corruptible man  
 and of birds  
 and four-footed animals  
 and crawling creatures.

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

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

For this reason **God gave them over**  
 to dishonorable passions;  
 for their females exchanged the natural function  
 for that which is unnatural,  
 and in the same way also the males abandoned the natural function of the male  
 and burned in their desire toward one another,  
 males with males committing indecent acts  
 and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God,  
**God gave them over**  
 to an unfit mind,  
 to do those things which are not proper,  
 having been filled with all

full of

they are

[1] unrighteousness,  
 [2] wickedness,  
 [3] greed,  
 [4] evil;  
 [5] envy,  
 [6] murder,  
 [7] strife,  
 [8] deceit,  
 [9] malice;  
 [10] gossips,  
 [11] slanderers,  
 [12] haters of God,  
 [13] violent,  
 [14] arrogant,  
 [15] boastful,  
 [16] inventors of evil,  
 [17] disobedient to parents,  
 [18] without understanding,  
 [19] untrustworthy,  
 [20] unloving,  
 [21] unmerciful;

and although they know the righteous requirement of God,  
 they do not do the same,  
 but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

**parataxis**, n. The linking of clauses or phrases together without utilizing conjunctions that mark subordinate relationships. The opposite of hypotaxis. The term can also be used when conjunctions are present (including an excessive use of καί), but subordination of thought is downplayed. Paratactic style is characteristic of Semitic languages. Also called prostaxis.

Matthew S. DeMoss, *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of New Testament Greek* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 93.

Possibilities:  
 a. Purpose  
 b. Result  
 c. Epexegetical

Grk. omits "for" and has relative pronoun "who" describing humanity under wrath.

Reason we need 17a  
 Source of 18a  
 Object of 18a  
 Describes 18c  
 Reason for 18; explains 18d  
 Reason for 19a  
 Time of 20b  
 Ground/ proof of 19  
 Explains/ expands of 10b  
 Means/ instrument of 20b  
 Result of 20a  
 Concessive of 20c-d  
 Reasons for 20f  
 Contrast and result of 21b-c  
 Concessive of 22b  
 Explains/ expands 21d-e  
 Means/ instruments of 23a  
 Inference of 18-23  
 Location/ sphere of 24a  
 Result of 24a  
 Restates 24c  
 Result of 24  
 Restatement of 25a (parataxis)  
 Describes 25c  
 Inference of 25  
 Result of 26a  
 Explains/ expands 26a-b  
 Explains/ expands 27a-b  
 Result of 27a-c  
 Reason for 28b  
 Continues 24a, 26a  
 Result of 28b  
 Restatement of 28c  
 Explains/ expands 28b-d  
 Concessive of 32c  
 Content of 32a  
 Restates 28d  
 Expands 32c