

## Paul's Letter to the Romans:



THE PINNACLE OF  
CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

### Let All the Poisons That Lurk in the Mud, Hatch Out...Pt. 1, Those Nasty Gentiles Romans 1:18-25

I think two of my favorite novels of all times are **"I, Claudius"** and **"Claudius, the God"**.<sup>1</sup> Robert Graves, who was wonderful classical scholar, wrote both novels. It seems pretty clear that Graves hatched the idea for the two novels after doing a translation of the famous Roman biography by Suetonius entitled, *Twelve Caesars*. Suetonius wrote *Twelve Caesars*, and it is also a book I highly recommend especially if you can get your hands on the translation by Graves, to recount the lives of the twelve Roman emperors starting with Julius Caesar and ending with Domitian.<sup>2</sup> These twelve Caesars were to a man...cruel, murderous and perverse.

Anyway, after Graves translated *Twelve Caesars*, he wrote the two novels, **"I, Claudius"** and **"Claudius, the God"** and here is the fun part. He wrote both novels as if he were the Emperor Claudius himself. So in the two novels, Graves has Claudius writing a personal, behind the scenes history of his own family. Claudius, or Claw..Claw, or Claudius the Stammerer, or Claudius the Idiot as he calls himself, starts of his family history with his grandfather Augustus and then writes about Tiberius, Caligula, himself and even a little about Nero. Claudius' story is filled with murder, scandal and intrigue. Now in the two novels, Graves

has Claudius explain his desire to have the scoundrel Nero follow him as emperor by writing something to this effect, **“I have decided Nero should follow me so that one day the empire will revert back to the Republic, that is to some form of representative government. I have been too good an emperor, too fair and too honest. I will give Rome Nero and when he is done with Rome, Rome will be done with emperors altogether. It will be bad, exceedingly bad...worse even than Caligula but they have to have the whole terrible truth about just how bad it can be before they come to their senses. Let all of the poisons that lurk in the mud, hatch out.”**<sup>3</sup>

Now, I have to tell you, I love that line. I think it is just about the best line ever turned in a novel and whenever I hear it or read it or even think of it, I almost immediately think of Romans 1:18-3:20. You see there is a real sense in which Paul just rears back and says, **“To understand the importance of the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel and how grand and glorious that righteousness truly is, you have to understand something of the reality of the sinfulness of fallen mankind. So let me explain that to you. Let me explain it to you in all its brutal ugliness. Let all of the poisons that lurk in the mud, hatch out.”**

Now, you may be thinking to yourself, **“Are you sure about that? Are you sure that was what Paul was trying to do?”** I certainly am not offended if you doubt me. In fact, what I want you to do this morning is to **carefully follow along in the text with me and be persuaded in your own mind.** My intention this morning is to just lay out the facts and the structure and let you decide whether or not that was what Paul intended to do. But before I get to that though, let me review for just a minute. You will remember that we have been working under

the premise that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans for a very specific reason. He wrote it to...**prepare a church he did not know for an intended visit. He did that by comprehensively explaining the gospel he preached and he did that in order that they might...**

...be edified,  
...be at peace with one another  
...help him on his way to Spain

In the first fifteen verses of Romans, Paul really just introduced himself to the Romans. He explained who he was, where he got his authority, a bit of the nature of the gospel he preached (it is about Christ and it is was revealed in the Old Testament), and why he was so ready to visit the Romans and preach the gospel to them (he is obligated, eager and unashamed). In verses 16 and 17, however, Paul shifts to the overall theme or **“big idea”** of his letter and that **“big idea”** concerns the **“righteousness of God”** that is revealed in the gospel. Do you remember that? Let me read it to you again.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 1:16**...I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. <sup>17</sup>For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Now, what Paul is going to do in Romans 1:18 through 3:20 is to explain why men need the **“righteousness”** that is revealed in the gospel. He is going to pose the idea that there is actually a **“righteousness that God provides”** to all who believe the gospel. Of course, having said that it was important for Paul to establish why it was that anyone needed such a **“righteousness”**. I particularly like the manner in which John Stott uses a dialogue to explain Paul’s progression of thought.

**Paul:** I am *not ashamed of the gospel* (16a).

**Q.** Why not, Paul?

**Paul:** Because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (16b).

**Q.** How so, Paul?

**Paul:** Because *in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed*, that is, God's way of justifying sinners (17).

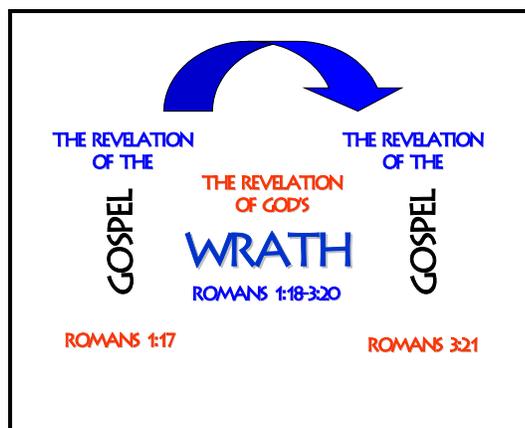
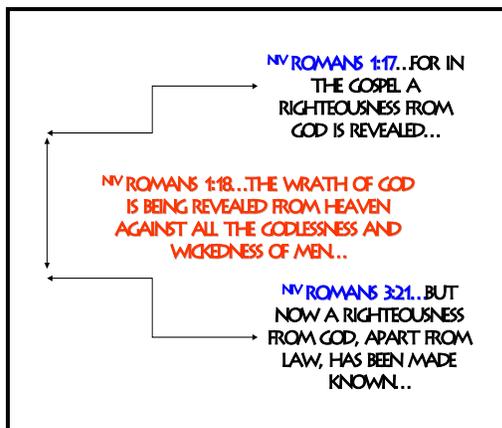
**Q.** But why is this necessary, Paul?

**Paul:** It's necessary because *the wrath of God is currently being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness* (18).

**Q.** But how have people suppressed the truth, Paul?

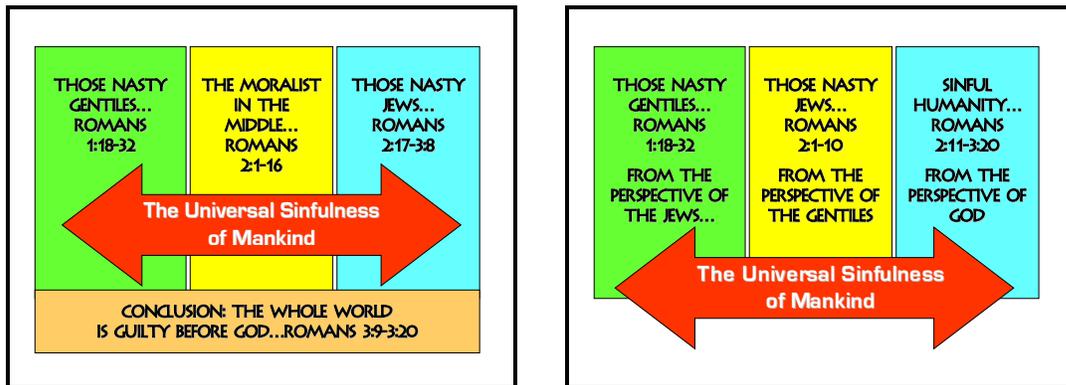
**Paul:** *By denying and rejecting the obvious truth about God's eternal nature and power* (19-20).<sup>4</sup>

Now there is a sense in which the whole discussion of God's wrath in Romans 1:18-3:20 is just one big parenthesis.<sup>5</sup> As a parenthesis, it is sort of sandwiched in between Paul's initial reference to the "**righteousness of God revealed in the gospel**" in 1:16-17 and Paul's actual discussion of that "**righteousness**" starting in 3:21. I think it may be helpful if you think of it like this:



Do you see what I mean? It is as if Paul is saying, **“I want to talk about the ‘righteousness of God’ revealed in the gospel but first I have to talk about the revelation of the ‘wrath of God’ so you will see why the ‘righteousness of God’ revealed in the gospel matters.”**

Now, finally let’s look at Paul’s explanation of the revelation of the wrath of God. Paul starts his discussion in Romans 1:18. What he is going to say is that God’s wrath is revealed against the **“unrighteousness”** of the whole world but he is not going to do that by starting off with the whole world. No, Paul is going to divide his examination of the world into three groups. First, Paul will explain why the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against the great-unwashed mass of Gentiles the world over.<sup>6</sup>



Then Paul goes after that group **“self-righteous moralizers”** in the middle. It is hard to tell whether he has someone in mind like the Greek Stoics who prided themselves on moderation in all things or whether he has in mind the moralistic Jews like the Sadducees.<sup>7</sup> Now historically Paul has always been understood to really only have two groups in mind, Jews and Gentiles. There is a sense in which I completely understand and agree with that. The problem is that Paul doesn’t actually use the word **“Jew”** until chapter 2 verse 17 and when he does it seems as if he is starting a new category. So, following Stott and others I am

placing here an overlapping category that I will call the “**critical moralist**” in the middle. I may include moralistic Gentiles or even non-religious Jews who would argue that those pagan Gentiles described in 1:18-32 are deserving of God’s judgment but that they in light of their superior moral enlightenment ought not be lumped together with the sinful masses.

That brings us, at last, to the third category under God’s wrath, the Jews. Paul doesn’t let the Jews off the hook anymore than he does the Gentiles or the “**critical moralizers**” in the middle. After he hammering the first two groups, he goes on to hammer the Jews and their sinful “**self-righteousness.**” We’ll see that next week or the week after in 2:17-3:8.

Finally, just so there is not doubt about the universal nature of Paul’s stinging indictment, Paul demonstrates the justness of God’s wrath against the “**unrighteousness**” of the whole world and he does that from the cosmic perspective of God Himself. That will occur in 3:9-3:20 and we’ll get there when we get there.

Now, let’s go back to Romans 1:18-25 and read about those nasty pagan Gentiles.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 1:18...**The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, <sup>19</sup>since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. <sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. <sup>21</sup>For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup>Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools <sup>23</sup>and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. <sup>24</sup>Therefore **God gave them over** in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. <sup>25</sup>They exchanged

the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator-- who is forever praised. Amen.

Now the first thing I want you to notice is that the **“wrath of God”** is being revealed. Paul’s point is not that it is going to be revealed, although there is a sense in which it will indeed be judged in the future; no, Paul’s point is that the wrath of God is being revealed now just as His righteousness is being revealed now.<sup>8</sup> What Paul is going to do here then is develop over the next seven verses *why* God’s wrath is being revealed. In the seven verses after that, Paul will explain *how* God’s wrath is being revealed.

Of course, I probably ought at least to comment on the word **“wrath”** as it is applied to God. There are many people today that disapprove of the idea that God might ever be wrathful. They reason like this, **“I am not wrathful. I am an educated man who knows how to control his passions. Since I am not wrathful myself...how is it that you expect me to believe God is wrathful? He is, at least, as noble as I am, isn’t He?”**

Do you think I am exaggerating my point here? If you do listen to the avowed atheist, Bertrand Russell, wrote in his book *Why I Am Not A Christian*.

There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ’s moral character, and that is that He believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment. Christ certainly as depicted in the Gospels did believe in everlasting punishment, and one does find repeatedly a vindictive fury against those people who would not listen to his preaching. You do not, for instance, find that attitude in Socrates. You find him quite bland and urbane toward the people who would not listen to him, and it is, to my mind, far more worthy of a sage to take that line than to take the line of indignation.<sup>9</sup>

Now isn't that typical of modern man to denigrate Christ's theology by misunderstanding what it was that concerned Him. You see the issue for Russell should have been not whether Christ was right about hell but whether He was right about being the Son of God. If He was right about that, He was most assuredly right about the other. Besides, there are two, really three reasons, why we cannot just dismiss the "**wrath of God**" as a crude vestige of a more cruel time.

First off, I think we have an obligation to let the text say what it says. The text uses the words "**wrath of God**" and that has to either be understood as the wrath God possesses or the "**wrath**" God with which God is angry. Secondly, this wrath is described as "**wrath revealed from heaven**" which is a long drawn out way of saying it is wrath that comes from God, from where God is. Now, it may be wrath that is buffered through some intermediate vehicle but that does not mean that God doesn't pull the lanyard that fires the cannon.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the Greek word for "**wrath**" here is the word ὀργή and is lexically different than the word is generally used to describe a slow, steady, unrelenting anger as opposed to a tempestuous outburst. God does not lose control and then break out in anger.<sup>11</sup> No, His wrath is slow, methodical and just. Besides it is His creation. We may not say, "**God you may not.**" I love Stott's summary here:

The wrath of God, then, is almost totally different from human anger. It does not mean that God loses his temper, flies into a rage, or is ever malicious, spiteful or vindictive. The alternative to 'wrath' is not 'love' but 'neutrality' in the moral conflict.' And God is not neutral. On the contrary, his wrath is his holy hostility to evil, his refusal to condone it or come to terms with it, his just judgment upon it.<sup>12</sup>

Now the question is not whether God's wrath is being revealed but rather where and why it is being revealed. Look at verse 18 again.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 1:18**...The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

Now where is God's wrath being revealed?

It is being revealed against all the **"godlessness and wickedness of men."**

Now I want to talk about those two words for a minute. J.B. Lightfoot says the first word **"godlessness"** or ἀσέβειαν is used to describe a sin against God while the second word **"wickedness"** or ἀδικίαν is used to describe a sin against man.<sup>13</sup> The first word has to do with failing to give God His proper due or worship and the second word has to do with the injustice that man shows man

You can see that especially in Greek I think because of the alpha privative attached to each word. Do you know what I mean by that? Sometimes in Greek if you want make a word mean the opposite of what it does normally you can just put the letter **"a"** in front of it and it changes the meaning completely. We have quite a few words like that in English. For example when we say **"amoral"** we don't mean something is moral we mean the opposite. When we say something is **"atypical"** we don't mean it is **"typical"** we mean it's not typical. That is what happens with both these words. The first word ἀσέβειαν,<sup>14</sup> without the **"α"** on it means **"worshipful reverence."** The second word ἀδικία,<sup>15</sup> without the **"α"** on it means **"just"** or **"righteous."**

You see the **"wrath"** of God is being revealed from heaven against all sacrilege, all lack of reverence, all the impiety that exists in the world.<sup>16</sup> It is also being revealed from heaven against all of man's injustice or unrighteousness against other men.

Now those two words describe the “**target**” of God’s wrath that is being revealed from heaven. But the two words do raise another question. How are men committing these acts of sacrilege and impiety and how are they committing these acts of injustice and unrighteousness. Verse 18 also answers that question. They are doing that by suppressing the truth about God.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 1:18**...The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

Now when I think of the word “**suppress**” I think of those fat little ice cream sticks that doctors used to use to hold down your tongue when they looked at your throat. But I also think of the Crocodile Hunter, Steve Irwin. If you have ever watched the Discovery Channel or Animal Planet, you have no doubt seen this extraordinarily insane Aussie jump on the back of crocodile to hold it down while others rush it and try to tie it up fast. What he is doing is suppressing the crocodile. He is holding it down, keeping it still, keeping it from going where it wants to go and doing what it wants to do. That’s what Paul says the unrighteous Gentiles are doing. They are trying their very best to hold the truth of God down by means of their wickedness.

Now you may be thinking, “**Surely that is a bit rough. No one would want to suppress the truth about God if they knew the truth about God.**” But notice what Paul says in verse 19.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 1:19**...since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

You see that is exactly what Paul is saying. The truth of God is written all over creation. Paul is saying God has revealed Himself just as clearly as He has revealed the Milky Way. From the glory of creation man ought to be able...no he *is* able to detect and understand the truth of the reality of God's power and divine nature. God has not revealed Himself fully but he certainly has revealed Himself truly.<sup>17</sup> These things are transparently obvious in all the things that we see and comprehend in creation and the fact that anyone anywhere would fail to honor God's power and divine nature as a result of His marvelous creation is really just a sacrilege.

Of course, man cannot see the gospel in the revelation of God in nature but that does not excuse man. Man (and by that I mean man and woman) has seen the truth about God's power and nature in creation and yet he has not responded rightly to what he has seen. Instead, he has perverted even the obvious truth that there is a God into something hideous and grotesque. Listen to how Paul puts it:

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 1:21**...For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Now, I want you to follow Paul's argument here. He is saying that the pagan Gentiles knew God in creation, not fully but truly. But they did not want to glorify God or to express thanks to God for His good and pleasant creation. Listen to Martyn Lloyd Jones here:

Not only do men not glorify Him, but Paul says here also, 'neither were (they) thankful'. I need not stay with these things; we all know what they mean; we have all been so guilty of every one of them! Man does not thank God for His mercy for His goodness, for all His dealings with us in

providence. We take the sunshine for granted; we are annoyed if we do not get it. We take the rain for granted. How often do we thank God for all these gifts and blessings! Now if we as Christians fail in this respect, how much more does the world fail! God causes His rain to fall and His sun to rise, (as our Lord reminds us in the Sermon on the Mount), upon the good and the evil, the just and the unjust, but mankind does not realize that; it does not stop to thank God — ‘neither were they thankful’. God is the giver of every good and perfect gift: He is ‘the Father of mercies’; and yet people go through the whole of their lives in this world and they never thank Him; they ignore Him completely. That is how they show their attitude towards God. In this way they suppress the truth that has been revealed concerning God.<sup>18</sup>

I think by way of application that that is one of the reasons we must be so relentless in teaching our children to be thankful. I think we ought both to make them aware of what they have and to make them say the words **“Thank you”** and to make them say them often. Sinful mankind has a disposition toward thanklessness. Even for believers, our most prevalent disposition is to moan and groan under the heavy weight of the material prosperity we enjoy or the health we enjoy. Instead of being thankful on what we have, we tend to focus on what we think we deserve. I am not talking about living a life void of any ambition of improving itself. But I am most certainly talking about avoiding living our lives so that we are always discontent, so that we are always unhappy, so that nothing ever causes us to express our gratitude.

Anyway, the pagan Gentiles suppressed the truth of God. In fact, they did something even worse. Their minds became perverted and dark and though they thought they were wise they became fools and traded in the truth about God, exchanged the truth of God, for a lie and turned instead to idolatry.

Now you don’t have to watch the History Channel or the Discovery Channel very long to recognize that anthropologists see religion developing in exactly the

opposite manner of how Paul says it developed. When you watch anthropologists discuss religion on television, they argue that man's worship was originally animistic, that is he worshipped rocks and trees and inanimate objects, things that he did not understand. Eventually, then, man became more sophisticated and began to express his worship more abstractly and used figures of animals and men or combinations thereof to express his developing concept of God. Then finally, as man evolved further in his sophistication, he began to conceive of God monotheistically. That is, he viewed God as a single, sovereign deity who created and sustains all things. But the Apostle Paul, speaking through the power of the Spirit of God, says religion developed exactly the opposite of that. Paul says that man started off with a clear understanding of God's nature and power and perverted it beyond recognition.<sup>19</sup> Paul says that all of the idolatry of the ancient pagan world was a willful, purposed, suppression and perversion of the truth. Paul says that you can see that in the foolishness and cruelty of idolatry.

Do you see that? Now I am not asking you to agree with me here but I am asking you to see that that is what Paul says. You see Paul is arguing that mankind has always been able to discern something of the truth of God's nature through God's creation. Theologians refer to this concept as "**natural theology**". They do not mean that it is "**natural**" in the sense of being effortless. They mean rather that it concerns the revelation of God in nature. This "**natural**" or "**general**" revelation of God is not adequate to save but it is more than adequate to condemn. Listen to what R.C. Sproul writes:

Every human being in this world knows, and knows clearly that there is a God. Many modern thinkers would disagree with that statement, but Paul's phrase, "what may be known about God," leaves no room for

doubt or probability. He is emphatic: "what may be known of God is plain to them." God's revelation of himself is not obscure. It is clear.

It is not as if God hid difficult, esoteric clues in various corners and crannies of the universe so that only astute theologians or intellectual geniuses who ruthlessly pursue truth would ever be able to uncover them. We are not like Diogenes who searched the dark corners of ancient Athens with a lamp trying to find an honest man. Nor are we seeking to break through some massive cosmic barrier to catch one faint clue of divine existence. Rather, God has clearly manifested himself to humankind, and through his creation has displayed his existence and his power.

No human being, regardless of race, personality, class, environment, or religion, will be able to stand before God and claim, "I never knew You existed. If only you had revealed yourself I would have believed." There are no acceptable excuses on judgment day.<sup>20</sup>

Now you may be thinking to yourself. O.K., I can accept that God does reveal Himself in creation, not fully but truthfully at least in terms of His **"eternal power"** and **"divine nature"**. You may even be thinking, **"I can even accept that the pagan world has gone out of its way to suppress the truth about God."**

The question is, **"So what? What has God done about it?"**

I want to give you the answer and I want to give it to you just as straight as Paul lays it out here in the text. God let the pagan world enjoy the fruit of its labor and He did that by giving them over to perversity. The pagan world wanted to pervert the truth about God so God let them go all the way. Look at how Paul puts it in verse 24.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 1:24...Therefore God gave them over...**

Don't you think that is about the most heartbreaking line in the Bible? I do and the most horrible aspect of it is that that phrase is repeated three times between verse 24 and the end of chapter one.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 1:24**...Therefore **God gave them over**...

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 1:26**...Because of this, **God gave them over**...

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 1:28**...Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, **he gave them over**...

Let me illustrate what Paul is saying this way. Imagine the pagan world in a small boat on fast moving river. God's revelation of Himself in creation was a bit like God holding on to the back this small boat and keeping it from hurtling down the river to destruction. But the pagan world wanted to suppress the truth of God that they knew. The pagan world wanted to exchange the truth of God for a lie. It longed to be out from under God's revelation. It longed to be out from under God's rule and dominion. So the pagan world pried at God's hand to let go. The pagan world beat at His compassionate hold with the oars of their boat saying, "Let us go! Let us go!" until God finally did just that. He let them go. Isn't that exactly what Paul says in verse 24.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 1:24**...Therefore **God gave them over** in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. <sup>25</sup> They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator-- who is forever praised. Amen.

You see the world wanted to be free of the presence of God and so God set it free. The pagan world wanted to exchange the truth of God for a lie and so God let the world exchange the truth about everything for a lie. Whereas the world should have worshipped Him as He revealed Himself in creation, it instead worshipped the lower things, the created things. In fact, what the pagan world was in a relentless search to find something other than God to worship. The exalted place God deserved in worship was replaced first with the image of animals, a serpent, a crocodile, a lion and then finally at last with a mirror.

Now I said at the beginning of today's lesson that this week we were going to look at why God's wrath was being revealed against. We have done that we have seen that God's wrath is being revealed from heaven against mankind who suppresses the truth about God and has exchanged it for a lie, any lie, instead of the truth.

Next week, we will look at how God's wrath is being revealed and I have to tell you it makes me a bit uncomfortable to talk about such things in mixed company. But I feel compelled to do so just to make clear to your minds why the revelation of the gospel is so wonderful, so marvelous. To more clearly see the beauty of the gospel as the height of God's revelation in Christ we have to first pass through the dark, stagnant bogs of the depravity of fallen man. I am uncomfortable about that but God grant us the courage to see these things as they really are...let all the poisons that lurk in the mud...hatch out.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Graves, *I, Claudius: From the Autobiography of Tiberius Claudius* (New York: Vintage Books, 1934; reprinted 1961), 1-433. Robert Graves, *Claudius the God* (New York: Vintage Books, 1935; reprinted 1962), 1-583.

<sup>2</sup> Gaius Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars* trans. Robert Graves (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1957), 181-207.

<sup>3</sup> Graves, *Claudius the God*, 523.

<sup>4</sup> John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News For the World*, (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 69.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 68. Stott writes and this so good, **"It is between these two great affirmations of the revelation of God's gracious righteousness that Paul sandwiches his terrible exposure of human unrighteousness (11:18-3:20)"**

<sup>6</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans: Volume 1, Introduction and Commentary on Romans 1-8* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975; reprint, 1992), 105.

<sup>7</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* in the Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series (London: Tyndale Press, 1963), 86-7." We know that there was another side to the pagan world of the first century than that which Paul has portrayed in the preceding paragraphs. What about a

manlike Paul's illustrious contemporary Seneca, the Stoic moralist, the tutor of Nero? Seneca might have listened to Paul's indictment and said, 'Yes, that is perfectly true of great masses of mankind, and I concur in the judgment which you pass on them—but there are others, of course, like myself who deplore these tendencies as much as you do.'

Paul imagines someone intervening in terms like these, and he addresses the supposed objector: 'My good sir, in judging others you are passing judgment on yourself, whoever you may be, for in principle you do the same things as you condemn in them.' And how apt this reply would have been to a man like Seneca! For Seneca could write so effectively on the good life that Christian writers of later days were prone to call him our own Seneca. Not only did he exalt the great moral *virtues*; he exposed hypocrisy, he preached the equality of all men, he acknowledged the pervasive character of evil ('all vices exist in all men, though all vices do not stand out prominently in each man), he practiced and inculcated daily self-examination, he ridiculed vulgar idolatry, he assumed the role of a moral guide. But too often he tolerated in himself vices not so different from those, which he condemned in others—the most flagrant instance being his connivance at Nero's murder of his mother Agrippina.

Even in this section of chapter ii, however, as more explicitly from verse 17 onwards, Paul is thinking chiefly of a Jewish critic. Such denunciation of pagan idolatry as we find in chapter i was common form in Jewish propaganda. Religious Jews found ample scope for passing adverse moral judgment on their Gentile neighbors."

<sup>8</sup> C.K. Barrett, *Romans: The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), 33.

<sup>9</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossways Books, 1991), 32.

<sup>10</sup> This is in response to those like Dodd who think that God allows His wrath to only be expressed through natural cause and effect (almost deistically). Dodd dislikes the idea that God is actively angry but then so did Pharaoh.

<sup>11</sup> Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Romans Volume 1: Man's Ruin 1:1-32 and God's Wrath 2:1-3:20* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1952 and 1953; reprint 1994), 220. Speaking of the slowness of God's wrath Barnhouse writes, "That illusion will vanish if we are able to think along with the sensible editor of a weekly paper in a farm area who answered a skeptic with a single sentence. The story goes that the godly farmers in a western community were greatly shocked one summer Sunday morning, when drove up to the little church in the country, to see that the man who owned the forty acres across from the church was in the midst of plowing, and that he had evidently been turning the furrows since dawn. The people went on into the church and could hear the rise and fall of the noise of the tractor as it approached and then went on to the other side of the field. The farmer who was doing this worked other fields all week and came back on the following Sunday to complete the job. And so on through the spring, summer and fall, he plowed, disked, harrowed, dragged, fertilized, drilled and cultivated the field, and finally cut, stacked and husked the corn and carried it to the crib. Then he wrote a letter to the editor of the local weekly, pointing out that he had done all this on Sunday and yet had the highest yield per acre of any farm in the county; and he asked the editor how the Christians could explain this. The

editor, with great common sense printed the letter, but followed it with the simple statement, "God does not settle His accounts in the month of October."

<sup>12</sup> Stott, 72.

<sup>13</sup> J.B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul: 1-2 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians 1-7, Romans 1-7, Ephesians 1:1-14* edited by J.R. Harmer (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1895; reprinted in 1980), 251.

<sup>14</sup> BDAG, 1173 & 6635.

<sup>15</sup> BDAG, 126.

<sup>16</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on Romans* (Ages CDRom: Works of Calvin), 50. Calvin obviously disagrees with Lightfoot. "Some make a difference between impiety and unrighteousness, and think, that by the former word is meant the profanation of God's worship, and by the latter, injustice towards men; but as the Apostle immediately refers this unrighteousness to the neglect of true religion, we shall explain both as referring to the same thing."

<sup>17</sup> L.W. Danner...my friend.

<sup>18</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Romans: Exposition of Chapter 1, The Gospel of God* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), 382.

<sup>19</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans (NIC)* 2 vols. in one (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968; reprint 1980), 41. Murray quotes Meyer thusly, "For heathenism", as Meyer says, "is not the primeval religion, from which man might gradually have risen to the knowledge of the true God, but is, on the contrary, the result of a falling away from the known original revelation of the true God in His works."

<sup>20</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Before the Face of God: A Daily Guide for Living from the Book of Romans Book 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 24-5.