

# Grace Community Church

OF TULSA

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## Reasons for the Wrath of God Being Revealed on Depraved Gentiles

These Expository Notes are devotional in nature and represent the pulpit ministry at Grace Community Church, instead of more polished detailed exposition.

We began the new section last lesson by camping on verse 18 that acts like a heading to the whole section of 1:18-3:20. The subject is the ongoing expression of the wrath of God manifested in history, due to the universality of human sin. Because all men are violators of God's law, being in rebellion to the Creator and failing to give Him glory, they are fallen from their created purpose and "children of wrath," or literally children under God's just sentence of wrath. The Apostle Paul argues that this is a universal sentence against "all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

He then gives three reasons for this just judgment: 1.) because they have rejected purposefully God's general revelation in vss. 18b-20; 2.) because they have foolishly reasoned to a darkened understanding in vs. 21; and 3.) because they have become religious practitioners of materialistic idolatry in vss. 22-23. Our lesson today will focus on the first reason for this ongoing wrath of God or sentence against "all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," i.e., they purposefully rejected God's General Revelation.

Remember Rom. 1:18 was a "heading" to the section, with the last phrase then being elaborated on. Those under God's ongoing historical wrath due to their ungodliness and unrighteousness, "suppress (Greek, *katechanton*) the truth." The verb when used in a positive sense, to hold down or onto; in a negative sense, which obviously is the case here, it means to hold down as to keep it away from understanding, ignoring it and not obeying it.

We will discover the Gentile barbarian (or pagan) nations here in Rom. 1:19-32 suppress the truth; then the moral Gentile cultured nations suppress the truth in Rom. 2:1-16 and even the Jewish privileged nation suppresses the truth in Rom. 2:17-3:8.

### - Gentile Barbarian Nations - They Purposefully Rejected God's General Revelation

...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. (cf. Romans 1:19-20)

Here Paul's argument advances by four major truths...

**A. Because what may be known of God is manifest in them for God has shown it to them.** These men, says Paul, "hold the truth in unrighteousness," that is, they suppress the truth or hold it down. Pastor MacArthur paraphrases the sense: "Who are constantly attempting to suppress the truth by steadfastly holding to their sin." They restrain the truth from taking hold of their thoughts and demanding of their conduct; they ignore the fact about God and his righteous demands on their life; they refuse the "good to choose the evil!" Psalm 14 and Psalm 53 both begin the same way...

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. [perhaps we should punctuate that differently, and read it, “The fool hath said in his heart, No God!” That is, the conscious thought of God is *suppressed*. He’s not an atheist, but someone refusing to entertain the convicting thought of God in his mind!] Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity; there is none that doeth good. God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Every one of them is gone back; they are altogether become filthy. There is none that doeth good, no not one.

You will notice this OT quote isn’t dealing just with some theoretical atheist or overtly wicked sinner but Paul will apply it in Romans 3:10ff to the whole of the human race, both Jews and Gentiles; both civil society and barbarians. His point is because there is a universality of sin there is a universality of guilt before God, hence all are under God’s just wrath.

Again, John R. W. Stott, summarizes the section this way...

The revelation of God’s righteousness in the gospel is necessary because of the revelation of His wrath against unrighteousness (18). The wrath of God, his pure and perfect antagonism to evil, is directed against all those who deliberately suppress what they know to be true and right, in order to go their own way. For everybody has some knowledge of God and of goodness, whether through the created world (19), or through conscience (32), or through the moral law written on human hearts (2:12ff.), or through the law of Moses committed to the Jews (2:17ff.). (p. 37)

In other words, to all men and women an adequate revelation has been made concerning the existence of God and His expected moral demands on the race but it has been rejected. Revelation might come from different directions but fallen man is “without excuse” as Paul will summarize that the end of the section. Man hasn’t lived up to the knowledge they have!

Notice, *all men and women* have a consciousness of God, which is “in them” (Greek preposition en could be *in, unto, to, upon*) and is

*empirically* verified by the “creation of the world.” Translators rightly consider it “in them” as it speaks to the inbred capacity of man to respond to his environment and deduce aspects of the majesty of God and His existence.

**B. His invisible attributes are clearly seen by the things that are made.** This is an oxymoron theological truth. This external natural revelation of the existence, Person and power of God, isn’t sufficient to bring men and women to salvation but it is sufficient to make them responsible! Ever since the creation of the world and the first man Adam, the whole of the human race are “without excuse” by the innate sense they have of God’s existence as validated by the hundreds and thousands of manifestations of the created order! (cf. John MacArthur’s commentary on *Romans*, pp. 79-81) The creation demands the existence of a powerful Designer.

Obviously this is one of the most valued passage in the discipline of apologetics, i.e., the defense of the faith to unbelievers such as atheists. It has been used as the central passage on the so-called Natural Theistic Arguments for the existence of God: the cosmological argument of cause and effect; the teleological argument of design implies a Designer; and the anthropological argument of man’s moral nature. These theological and philosophical constructs are not taught in the Bible, so we omit their development but they are anchored to Romans 1:19-20 for a foundation. The Scripture doesn’t give arguments for the existence of God but as suggested here, assumes His existence because it is verifiable through creation itself.

**C. Even His eternal power and godhead.** Obviously the created order depicts the awesome power of God. The qualifying term “eternal” is used, as the observed creation began so long ago and implies the power already resident in God or He couldn’t call the universe into existence by His spoken word.<sup>1</sup> Notice the two categories

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<sup>1</sup> It is questioned by commentators if “eternal” goes with both *power* and *Godhead*, i.e., “His eternal

relative to God that is manifested through observing the created world:

**1.) Creation manifests the Power of God** is a primary attribute mentioned in Scripture, clearly seen by creation. Known as the omnipotence of God Stephen Charnock describes as...

The power of God is that ability and strength whereby He can bring to pass whatsoever He pleases, whatsoever His infinite wisdom may direct, and whatsoever the infinite purity of His will may resolve...as holiness is the beauty of God's attributes, so power is that which gives life and action to all the perfections of the Divine nature. How vain would be the eternal counsels, if power did not step in to execute them...Without power His mercy would be but feeble pity, His promises an empty sound, His threatenings a mere scare-crow. God's power is like Himself: infinite, eternal, incomprehensible; it can neither be checked, restrained, nor frustrated by the creature.

The power of God is first manifested in the Almighty calling into existence the heavens and earth, or the entire universe itself. This demonstration of creation is wondrous enough. Matter of fact the name "Almighty" is used almost 60 times in the OT and NT, speaking of the uniqueness of His power. The very name "God" (Hebrew elohim or el) used some 3,000 times in the OT means, "strong one."

The first book of the Bible written records God interrogating the questioning Job, part of which is a setting forth of His power of creation and sustaining all that is.

Job 38:1-11. Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind [i.e., tornado], and said: "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding.

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power and His eternal Godhead." That is possible grammatically but it seems better to consider "eternal" as limited only to the first category.

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? "Or who shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth and issued from the womb; When I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band; When I fixed My limit for it, and set bars and doors; When I said, 'This far you may come, but no farther, and here your proud waves must stop!'

Who, that looks to the midnight sky; and, with an eye of reason, beholds its rolling wonders; who can forbear enquiring, Of what were their mighty orbs formed? Amazing to relate, they were produced without materials. They sprung from emptiness itself. The stately fabric of the universal nature emerged out of nothing. What instruments were used by the Supreme Architect to fashion the parts with such exquisite niceness, and gave so beautiful a polish to the whole? How was it all connected into one finely proportioned and nobly finished structure? A bare fiat accomplished it all. Let them be, said God. He added no more; and at once the marvelous edifice arose, adorned with every beauty, displaying innumerable perfections, and declaring amidst enraptured seraphs its Creator's praise. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breadth of His mouth." (Psalm 50) (James Hervey, 1789)

The suffering Job himself asked a series of rhetorical questions about the Almighty power of God, in the creative acts...

Job 26:7-14. He stretches out the north over empty space; he hangs the earth on nothing. He binds up the water in His thick clouds, yet the clouds are not broken under it. He covers the face of His throne, and spreads His cloud over it. He drew a circular horizon on the face of the waters, at the boundary of light and darkness. The pillars of heaven tremble, and are astonished at His rebuke. He stirs up the sea with His power, and by His understanding He breaks up the storm. By His Spirit He adorned the heavens; his hand pierced the fleeing serpent. Indeed these are the

mere edges of His ways, and how small a whisper we hear of Him! But the thunder of His power who can understand?"

Now remember Job didn't have a Bible to learn that. Where did he get his theology about the Creator? From observing creation itself. He studied the first Book from God, the world and what could be observed of the universe.

But notice here in Romans 1:19-20 that this isn't just creation power but *sustaining* power. This is the point of Romans 1:19-20, i.e., that the created world is observed in it being sustained continually. "He *upholdeth* (Greek, *pheron* refers to both sustaining and moving it to a specific goal) all things by the word of His power" (cf. Heb. 1:3). There are no so-called "laws of nature" where simple impersonal physics operates on previously created matter but the ongoing sustaining of every atom in the vast universe, by the ongoing power of the Almighty! Again in Colossians 1 Paul affirms similarly...

Col 1:16-17. 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 (Greek, *sunesteken*, NAS, "hold together").

Neh 9:6. You alone are the LORD; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You.

Again the Lord Almighty rhetorically points out both creation and sustaining of the world is from His mighty power, to which none are equal. Matter of record God is the source of all other power.

Isa 40:25-31. "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. Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my just claim is passed over by my God"? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Now notice carefully that the Apostle Paul not only is mentioning God's power or omnipotence demonstrated by observing creation but His "eternal" power. In essence it is the power of the Almighty that He always had, i.e., it was manifested in calling the universe into existence out of nothing by only His powerful word, it is manifested in sustaining the created things by His present word, and it will be manifested in His realizing the whole of the created universe to its appointed goal in the future. It is God's "eternal power" seen in creation, in history and realized promise of what will come.

The reasonable conclusion of creation is that God exists and that He is powerful beyond measure, calling into existence the universe and sustaining it moment-by-moment. Creation demands that verdict and leaves man without excuse! Such thoughts should produce awe, astonishment, praise, thankfulness and adoration.

**2.) Creation manifests the Godhead of God** is less obvious (KJV, NKJV), simplified by the NAS and NIV as "divine nature." The Greek term is *theiotes* and only used here in Romans 1:20 in the NT. This would refer to God's attributes or His virtues, other than God's omnipotence. Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones summarizes this unique term...

It means "deity"; it means "divinity". Even His eternal power and divinity, not His Godhead...It means those particular attributes in God in which

He reveals not so much Himself and His Being, as His powers and attributes; what the Apostle Peter in his first Epistle calls, "his virtues." (p. 373)

It could very well include those attributes of God that are what theologians call "incommunicable," as they transcend the finite. As vast and intricate as the creation of the universe, being finite it is in contrast to the infinite God. This would include at least God's self-existence, immensity and omnipresence, His eternity, His infinity, and His immutability.

The incommunicable attributes are those that belong to God explicitly, so that there is nothing resembling them in a created spirit. Such are self-existence, simplicity, infinity, eternity, immutability. The communicable attributes are those which are possessed in a finite degree, more or less by man and angels. Such as wisdom, benevolence, holiness, justice, compassion, truth. (W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, p. 275)

***Creation speaks of God's self-existence***, i.e., sometimes called His aseity (lit., *from Himself*) suggests that the ground of God's being is within Himself and He is independent of all things so that He is totally immune from external influences. Jesus said, "as the Father has life in Himself." (cf. John 5:26) There wasn't a time when God was not nor anything contributing to His perfect essence from outside Himself. Paul mentions to the Athenian philosophers...

Acts 17:24-25. "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. "Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

Astonishingly, God never needed anything or the creation itself would have existed from all time. But creation had a beginning. And might we add the obvious, i.e., that the whole of creation exist only for one purpose which is His glory.

Rev 4:8-11. The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "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."

Ps 90:1-2. LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

There was a timer, if "time" it could be called, when God, in the unity of His nature (though subsisting equally in three persons), dwelt all alone. "In the beginning God." There was no heaven, where His glory is now particularly manifested. There was no earth to engage His attention. There were no angels to sing His praises. There was no universe to be upheld by the word of His power. There was nothing, no one, but God; and that not for a day, a year, or an age, but "from everlasting." During a past eternity God was alone – self-contained, self-sufficient, in need of nothing. Had a universe, or angels, or humans been necessary to Him in any way, they also would have been called into existence from all eternity. Creating them when He did added nothing essentially. He changes not (Mal. 3:6), therefore His essential glory can be neither augmented nor diminished. (A. W. Pink, *Gleaning in the Godhead*, p. 11)

The contrast is between the dependent character of a temporal creation with the eternal self-existent God who is in need of nothing. Observing a world that is not eternal and in need of sustaining, causes men and women to look off to what is in clear contrast. Once again, such thoughts should produce awe, astonishment, praise, thankfulness and adoration.

***Creation speaks to God's immensity and omnipresence***, i.e., that God is everywhere present in the whole of His essence throughout the universe. And as Solomon says, "even the heaven and heavens cannot contain Thee." Grudem defines:

God does not have size or special dimensions and is present at every point of space with His whole being, yet God acts differently in different places. (p. 173)

As mankind looks at the vastness of creation they still see a level of finite space but immense space and so look off to the One who isn't limited! Notice the psalmist contemplates this awesome aspect of God.

Ps 139:5-10. You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.

Isa 40:15-18. Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the scales; look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless. To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?

Isa 40:21-22. Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.

As finite man is trapped in space at a particular location at any given moment, he is humbled by the creation's display in the great contrast, i.e., that the Creator Himself is not so limited and when He is "here" He is also "there." Once again, such thoughts should produce awe, astonishment, praise and thankfulness.

***Creation speaks of God's eternity***, i.e., His infinitude relative to time. Wayne Grudem defines this attribute as...

God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in His own being, and He sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time and acts in time. (p. 168)

As immense God is beyond space; as eternal He is not limited to time. Hence He is called "the eternal God" (Gen. 21:33) and "the one that inhabits eternity" (Isa. 57:13). And this inference is observable through creation. "Before the mountains were brought forth, from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God" (cf. Psalm 90:1). Some translate, "from eternity to eternity, Thou art God." Here the psalmist contrasts the eternal God with the temporal nature of human life, a brief 70 or 80 years, like a puff of smoke. Unlike God. Even creation itself offers observable elements of time or better temporalness. Once again, such thoughts should produce awe, astonishment, praise and thankfulness.

***Creation speaks of God's immutability***, i.e., that God doesn't change, neither is somehow altered by events in His universe. All the created order is in contrast to this. Grudem defines this attribute of God as...

God is unchanging in His being, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions and He acts and feels differently in respect to different situations. (p. 163)

Grudem, in my opinion, wisely challenges the immutability of God relative to emotions or passions. Philosopher Aristotle introduces

discussion on God as “the unmoved mover,” and since then theologians agreed that the “impassibility” of God, i.e., that He is not subject to emotions, as the Westminster Confession of Faith summarizes. But the Bible seems to teach that God is an emotionally changing sovereign. However He is unchangeable in His being, purposes and promises, as Grudem defines. He stands in contrast to a mutable and changing creation, so as man examines the creation, it speaks by way of contrast to the immutable God.

Ps 102:23-28. He weakened my strength in the way; he shortened my days. I said, "O my God, do not take me away in the midst of my days; your years are throughout all generations. Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; yes, they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will have no end.

Mal 3:5-7. And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien-- because they do not fear Me," says the LORD of hosts. "For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. Yet from the days of your fathers you have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts.

James 1:16-17. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

A. W. Pink draws a threefold conclusion as we consider the immutability of God in His being, purposes and promises...

Here is solid comfort. Human nature cannot be relied upon, but God can...The permanence of God's character guarantees the fulfillment of His

promises...Here is encouragement to prayer. "What comfort would it be to pray to a god that, like a chameleon, changed color every moment? Who would put up a petition to an earthly prince that was so mutable as to grant a petition one day, and deny it another?" (S. Charnock, 1670)...Here is terror for the wicked. [most likely the thing Paul had in mind, as he speaks of the ongoing historical wrath of God in this section]. Those who defy Him, break His laws, have no concern for His glory, but live their lives as though He did not exist, must not suppose that, when at the last they shall cry to Him for mercy, He will alter His will, revoke His word and rescind His awful threatenings. No, He has declared, "Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them" (Ezek. 8:18). God will not deny Himself to gratify their lusts. God is holy, unchangingly so. Therefore God hates sin, eternally hates it. (*Gleanings in the Godhead*, p. 37)

Creation illustrates the otherness of God because it is in change; it is mutable; it is wearing down as the Second Law of Thermodynamics proves. Men should consider the mutable creation and be awed by the obvious that God doesn't change and He is not subject to decay. Once again, such thoughts should produce awe, astonishment, praise and thankfulness.

**D. So that they are without excuse.** Here is the climatic conclusion of the creation manifesting the invisible God with clarity. Man has no excuse in the sense that he cannot blame he had no knowledge of the existence of God. He had adequate knowledge that makes him responsible.

God places within man the capacity as he observes the created world, to look off to the reality of the existence of an Almighty Being who is unlike them and unlike creation itself, i.e., One who has unlimited infinite power, self-existence, infinite relative to space or immensity, infinite relative to time or eternity and immutability in His being, purposes and promises. And that demonstrated and empirical

message makes man without excuse. As previously mention by Paul, the existence of God is “manifest in them for God has shown it unto them.” The participle translated “in” (Greek, en) could be translated “in” or “to” or “unto,” for whatever the precise translation, there is something placed within man that results in his discerning empirically from the created world, as sense of God’s power and divine nature. We might say, God shows to all men and women by His creation His existence such as power and Divine nature, which then resonates with something He has built into the constitution of man. The fact of God is “manifest in them for God has shown it unto man,” leaving man “without excuse.”

### Conclusion

Why are the Gentile barbarians guilty? They don’t enjoy the revelation of God from the Bible nor even from culture but they are without excuse because of a universal creation. The first reason is that they reject God’s general revelation, ignoring the empirical evidence all around them which should awaken or speak to the innate idea of the existence of God. The Creator has put within man something that connects with the exterior creation, such that God’s very power and Divine nature is clearly seen and so, rejecting that general revelation they are without excuse.

For the believer he or she reads the Book of Creation and bows in both awe, astonishment and adoration. Creation observed is a humbling witness to the Majesty or greatness of our Creator! Too seldom do believers extol the fact that they are Created and by implication created for the purpose of the glory of God.