



St. Paul's Lutheran Church
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The Epistle of Romans

The Justification of the Ungodly

Chapter 1 Verses 18-21

There is a unity between 1:18-3:20 and 3:21-4:25. In the first section, we hear about wrath; in the second section, we hear about grace. In the first section, we hear about deeds; in the second section, we hear about faith.

As we look to verses 18-21, though, we need to tackle the term 'wrath.' Wrath is not so much emotion – I'm angry! But rather, wrath is the holiness of God in action against sin. But who is this wrath against? It is against everyone because everyone has sinned.

But what is sin? Sin is anything we think, say, and do that violates God's holiness – namely expressed in the 10 Commandments. But get this, it is worse than we think. That is to say; it is bad enough when we naively and foolishly sin (involuntarily sin); however, it is worse because we actively suppress the truth.

We human beings (according to Paul in verse 18) are not passively ignorant but instead, we actively suppress the truth. If you don't agree with this, take a moment and recall the most recent movie or book that you've enjoyed. What was the problem or mistake that a

person did that is being covered up, denied, or normalized? Why is the hero in the movie or book trying to uncover truth? Furthermore, think of all the work that you and I do to keep up with the Joneses by hiding our faults and praising our strengths. Think about all the work we do to keep our mistakes hidden and out of sight of others – all of our false fronts. Think about all the pretending, exaggerating, comparing, and self-justifying that we do. Are these not ways in which we suppress the truth about our sinful condition and our sinful actions? As already stated, 'everyone' suppresses the truth!

So, because everyone sins, everyone is without excuse. Everyone deserves God's wrath!

But what about those who have never heard of God and His saving Gospel? Is it fair that they get wrath when they have no chance to hear the Gospel? This is not only a confusion of Law and Gospel, but it doesn't acknowledge the reality that human hearts are rebellious.

If you press a pagan really really hard, they will admit that they violate their conscience and do what they want – and often they don't care. Keep in mind that all of mankind has the Law of God written on their hearts. This is what we call the conscience. But even with a conscience, what do we find? We find humanity actively suppressing truth. We find mankind covering the conscience, justifying evil, and making excuses for their every wrong! They are without excuse! God gives wrath where wrath is due! Frankly stated, all of humanity is just like Adam and Eve. We want to be like God; we want what we want, and we want it right now. We want to be masters and commanders of our own lives and everyone around us. We want God to be in our debt and do for us whatever we want. And when we are confronted? Wow, fasten a seatbelt, we get angry. In anger, we will fight and even start wars to prove that we are right!

And just in case we are still trying to justify ourselves, we all know that we are creatures – created by something else. (Atheism is really very uncommon) And even knowing that we are created beings, we still don't care. We still try to justify ourselves. Sometimes we think we can buy off the deity by giving a deity some bargaining chip. *"If I do good works, if I sacrifice an animal, if I give something up, the deity will overlook my sin and will consider me okay."*

And so, God is fair to pour out wrath on all sinners. Mankind wilfully rebels, the heart refuses to understand, and the thoughts of mankind are bent inward. We are fools like Adam. We are in darkness just like Adam. Who will save us from this life of sin, death, and darkness? Is there anyone that can save us?



