

# The Gospel According To Paul: Romans

*Maurice W. Lusk, III*

## **THE REDEMPTION DRAMA** *(The Theological Block)* (1:18-11:36)

This section of material is called “the theological block” because here is found a development of Paul’s theology of the redemption. His most intriguing concepts concerning God’s coming into the world to effect the salvation of man are here: that all men stand before God as guilty of sin (1:18-3:20), that God has sent the promised Messiah into the world and those who most longed for the coming of the Messiah rejected him (3:21-8:39). Within the development of this Messianic theme he addresses several of the concepts which are at work in this redemption drama: a treatise on righteousness or justification (3:21-31), a treatise on faith, a treatise of the meaning of the death of Christ and the theme of divine reversal which God’s effected through the death and resurrection of Christ (5:1-21). A beautiful Adam/Christ typology is found here as well as a series of treatises of freedom from the power of sin (6:1-23), freedom from the Law of Moses (7:1-25), and a treatise on freedom from the curse of death (8:1-27).

This whole section of material may be called “The Redemption Drama” in that here is where Paul’s story of Jesus is told. His identity as the second Adam, the divine reversal of the curse brought upon mankind through the first Adam, and the means by which this salvation became a reality for the whole of mankind are beautifully developed here in this section. Paul’s first line of argument in this theological section (1:18-11:38) is that . . .

## I. ALL MEN STAND BEFORE GOD AS GUILTY OF SIN, GENTILE AND JEW ALIKE (1:18-3:20)

### 1. The Guilt of the Gentiles (1:18-32)

Paul has just stated in his thesis statement of 1:16-17 that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. Here he enters into a discussion of why God's salvation is necessary. All men, Jews and Gentiles alike - the whole human race - are condemned. Man is a lost being. "Lost" in Biblical language does not mean not knowing where one is; rather, it means to be destroyed or ruined. In the Greek New Testament the word translated lost is *apoleia*, which literally means, "to be destroyed or ruined." In the New Testament sense of the word, man has destroyed himself. How? By his submission to the enslaving power of sin, which has resulted in disbelief, moral malignancy, and spiritual ruin. And because of this the whole of the human race stands under the wrath of God. This is the line of argumentation Paul pursues in these opening lines of this theological block. He first addresses the guilt of the Gentiles (1:18-32) then follows with the guilt of the Jews (2:1-3:20).

#### *(1) Man's Rejection of God: They Gave Him Up (1:18-23)*

*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.*

#### *God's Wrath Is Being Revealed Against All Godlessness And Wickedness Of Men (1:18)*

In the Greek New Testament the expression "is being revealed" is in

the present tense (i.e., it is an ongoing action or an action perceived by Paul as a present reality). Paul obviously has a present situation in mind. But how was God's wrath being revealed at the time of Paul's writing?

There is a twofold sense of the revelation of the wrath of God. There is an eschatological (endtime) revelation of God's wrath and an ever present revelation of the wrath of God which is, in essence, the headwind everyone is made to feel who runs in opposition to God. In this latter sense the sinner is condemned not to Hell but to sin and its consequences. Here in this text this would be: to the lusts of the heart (1:24-25), to vile passions (1:26-27), and to a debased mind (1:28-32). For the one yielding to the power of sin and pursuing these practices, God condemns to their choices. It is in this sense that God's wrath may be spoken of in the present tense. God has consigned the Gentiles to their sins as a function of his wrath, which, as horrible as that may be, is yet not the revelation of his wrath in the eschatological sense.

This wrath of God is manifested against all ungodliness of all men - Gentiles and Jews alike. This raises the question of God's justification for such an action. Upon what basis does he declare all men guilty of sin and condemned? Paul's first addresses the guilt of the Gentiles. God gave them up because they gave him up.

***They Gave Him Up Even Though They Had Adequate Evidence  
for His Existence as God (1:19-23)***

Paul's argument here is that the Gentiles had every good reason to believe in God (i.e., to know that God was God) and no good reason to disbelieve - they were without excuse for their disbelief. Paul reasons (translating from the Greek very literally):

*Because that which can be known of [concerning] God is manifested revealed to them; for God was made manifest to them. For the invisible things of God (i.e., his eternality, his power, and his divine nature/deity) may be perceived, being clearly seen from creation [that which was created], so they (mankind) are without excuse (vv 19-20).*

**Paul's Argument for the Existence of God**

This line of argumentation for the existence of God was popular

among the Greek philosophers (Plato, *Timaeus*) as well as Jewish theologians (Wisdom of Solomon 13). This argument in present day apologetics is called "the cosmological argument," (i.e., the fact of creation implies a Creator). The line of reasoning here follows that one can know from observing the universe that something or someone must, of necessity, stand behind it as its cause or creator. Something as massive and magnificent as our universe could not have come from nothing, it could not have "just happened." Any **cause** adequate enough to have produced such a wondrous **effect** must of necessity have existed before it (i.e., be eternal), must possess such power as would be adequate enough to produce it (i.e., be omnipotent), and must be greater than man or any other being (i.e., must be a Supreme Power or Being). It is the teleological argument which leads to the conclusion that the design and order of creation implies an intelligent cause, i.e., a Supreme Being.

Paul's argument then is that all men of all ages in all cultures had before them evidence adequate enough to convince them that there must be a Creator. Some men of the ancient world acknowledged the existence of such a God while others denied him. The Gentile world as a whole, however, denied him; and in his place they worshipped that which was created.

### **Conclusion**

Paul's point is clear, mankind had rejected God, refused to believe in the Creator, and in his place they set the creature as the object of belief and devotion. This is what idolatry is: *displacing God as the object of our devotion and putting the creation at the center of our universe rather than the Creator*. Man was a self-destroyed being. But his decline from the being created in the image of God to the being who created gods in his own image began in "disbelief." They gave God up.

Throughout this text Paul argues that God has given man every opportunity to know him and to believe in him. Such a line of reasoning calls into serious question the belief that God has chosen or elected certain men to know him and has rejected all others as incapable of coming to faith. None of what Paul has said here in this text can be reconciled with the Calvinistic doctrine that God has created some men total depraved and incapable of knowing him or coming to faith, and that he has elected a portion of the human race, has determinism that they, and they alone, shall

be brought to belief, and has foreordained and predestined that these elect one shall know him while withholding the evidence of his existence and the opportunity of coming to belief to the rest of the human race. Such a concept of God as a discriminatory and prejudiced being, ( i.e., that he is a respecter of persons) is completely absent from the reasoning and writings of Paul as may be seen here in these verses.

Paul's whole line of reasoning in this text is that all men have been given adequate evidence from which to conclude that God exists and most have chosen to rejected it and pursued objects of devotion of their own creation. Because of this, argues Paul, they have become darkened in their reasoning and morally malignant in their behavior. They are self-destroyed because of their choices and are without excuse for their present state of estrangement from God. They gave God up, they rejected him, and he gave them up to their choices. If man is not a free moral agent, this whole piece of reasoning given by Paul is completely inexplicable.

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