I. INTRODUCTION. Our world is witnessing an unparalleled explosion of evil. Things which were considered unmentionable just a few years ago are now openly discussed. How can we explain what is taking place? The answer is in our subject for this week. People are ignoring God’s clear truth about sin. In this week’s lesson, the Apostle Paul showed how pagan or ungodly people who have little, if any biblical knowledge fall under the condemnation of God. His discussion will center on how pagans have responded to God’s truth.
II. LESSON BACKGROUND. Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome. Neither he nor the other church leaders, James and Peter had yet been to Rome. Most likely the Roman church had been established by believers who had been at Jerusalem for Pentecost (see Acts 2:10), and travelers who had heard the Good News in other places and had brought it back to Rome (for example, Priscilla and Aquila: see Acts 18:2; Romans 16:3-5). Paul wrote the letter to the Romans during his ministry in Corinth, at the end of his third missionary journey just before returning to Jerusalem (see Acts 20:3; Romans 15:25). He wrote the letter to encourage the believers and to express his desire to visit them someday (within three years he would). The Roman church had no New Testament because the gospels were not yet being circulated in their final written form. Thus, this letter may well have been the first piece of Christian literature the Roman believers had seen. Written to both Jewish and Gentile Christians, the letter to the Romans is a systematic presentation of the Christian faith. After a brief introduction, Paul presents the facts of the gospel (see Romans 1:3-6). Then in Romans 1:7-15, Paul voiced his strong desire to visit the believers in Rome, followed by his declaration of allegiance to the Gospel (see Romans 1:16-17). In verse 16, Paul’s conviction is that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes both Jews and Greeks (Gentiles). To those who do not believe, but are disobedient and rebellious, the gospel reveals the wrath of
God. Therefore, Paul goes on to describe how sinful man is under God’s condemnation and God has revealed His wrath towards sin. This is where our lesson begins.

**III. REVELATION OF GOD’S WRATH (Romans 1:18).** Having declared that salvation comes to those who believe, Paul then addresses the consequences of unbelief. In our first verse the Apostle said “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.” Paul began here by stating that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven.” This refers to God’s righteous anger that He has and is revealing or making known to mankind. Unlike human wrath or anger, the “wrath of God” is not an irrational emotional outburst of rage. It’s His personal and proper reaction to sin based on His holy character. God’s wrath is presently being directed “against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” The word “ungodliness” refers to rebellion against God and acting like He doesn’t even exist. It is religious perversity. “Unrighteousness” is rebellion against God’s revealed will and treating others unjustly. Not having reverence for God naturally leads to unrighteous acts. Righteousness is an attribute of the one true God (see Matthew 6:33), therefore He requires righteous conduct from His people (see I John 2:29; I Peter 1:15-16). Both of these terms, “ungodliness and unrighteousness” describe evil
which is always the object of God’s wrath. The phrase “who hold the truth in unrighteousness” refers back to the ungodly and unrighteous. The word “hold” in Greek means to “hold down” or “to suppress.” Paul was saying that it’s the unbelievers’ nature to suppress or push themselves away from whatever revelation God gives of Himself, whether it’s His righteousness or His wrath even though they know better. **Note:** People will not admit that God’s judgment upon evil is just, but they continue in their sin trying to convince themselves that either God doesn’t exist or He does not disapprove of their sin. Truth is they are deceiving themselves, for God’s wrath is revealed against them. The wrath Paul is speaking of is not the future judgment that God has promised, but His wrath that is presently and continuously being revealed.

**IV. REASONS FOR GOD’S WRATH (Romans 1:19-23)**

**A. Mankind’s rejection of divine revelation (Romans 1:19-20).**

1. (vs. 19). In this verse Paul goes on to say “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.” The word “Because” introduces the reason why God can pronounce that the unsaved are guilty of willfully suppressing and rejecting the truth. The phrase “that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them” means that what
men know about God is evident within them (in their inner consciousness), for God made it evident to them. In other words, everyone has some knowledge of God put in them by God. Human history began with people knowing God. Human history is not the story of a beast that worshiped idols, and then evolved into a person worshiping one God. Human history is just the opposite. People began knowing God, but turned from the truth and rejected God.

2. (vs. 20). The Apostle continued to say in this verse “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” The words “invisible things of him” refer to God’s attributes. Paul stated that God’s attributes have been manifested or shown since “the creation of the world” and “are clearly seen.” In His creation God has given a revelation of Himself to the fallen race (see Acts 17:24-29). God’s revelation of Himself is “understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.” The Greek word for “Godhead” means divinity; it does not mean that God revealed His Trinitarian nature. Creation shows God’s handiwork (see Psalms 19:1-6). What Paul is saying here is that God gave mankind adequate revelation of Himself in nature so that men would know of Him and recognize Him as Creator. Creation speaks of a Creator and of the His eternal power. It also reveals that the Creator must be God, because no created being could bring creation into existence. Therefore, men “are without excuse”
when they worship idols and suppress or reject what creation says about God. From the world around them, humans knew that there was a God who had the wisdom to plan and the power to create. The unsaved are also “without excuse” before God, because they violate the moral standard of their own consciences (see Romans 2:15). Man is incurably religious. In every people, no matter how primitive, some form of religion can be found. Man’s heart cries out for a power beyond himself, not knowing that this longing was put there by the Creator. All these facts about God are not hidden in creation but “are clearly seen” so mankind has no excuse for rebelling against Him, since He has revealed Himself to them. **Note:** God’s divine revelation in what He has created does not tell mankind all they need to know about the Creator and the salvation He has provided through Jesus Christ. However, it does leave people without any excuse for their rebellion. Unsaved mankind is condemned by the fact that while there is clear and sufficient evidence that God exists, they have still rejected Him.

If we choose to believe that there is no Creator-God, we have denied the truth and are without excuse when faced with God’s judgment. So we may ask, does anyone have an excuse for not believing in God? The Bible answers with an emphatic no! God has revealed what He is like in and through His creation, even though creations’ testimony has been distorted by the fall of man, Adam’s sin (see Genesis 3:17-19). Therefore, every person either accepts or rejects God. Don’t be fooled. When the day comes for God to judge one’s response to Him, no excuse will be accepted. Critics of the
gospel charge us with unfairness when we teach that unbelievers are lost because they sin. The truth is they sin because they are lost, and they continue in their lost state because they have rejected the light God gave them in His creation, His holy Word and His Son, Jesus Christ. Yes, they are without excuse!

B. Mankind’s self-exaltation (Romans 1:21-22).

1. (vs. 21). Paul goes on to say in this verse “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” Again, the word “Because” introduces another reason why unbelievers are “without excuse.” They are guilty before God because “when they knew God,” by virtue of His Self-revelation in the physical creation, “they glorified him not as God.” Even though the revelation of God in His creation was enough for people to know that there was a God who was worthy of honor, they didn’t glorify Him as God. In addition, the ungodly “neither were thankful.” The ungodly have no desire to acknowledge the goodness of the divine Giver for all the good things they enjoyed. Instead of being thankful, they “became vain in their imaginations,” that is, their minds were filled with worthless or purposeless thoughts. Instead of depending on God’s revelation, they shut Him out from their thinking and “their foolish heart was darkened.” In other words, spiritual darkness covered “their foolish
hearts” so that they were unable to put together all the evidences about God. **Note:** Although this verse declares that “they (the ungodly) knew God,” it is evident that this knowledge of God was not saving knowledge. People are capable of knowing many things about God without obtaining salvation. The question might arise, “If this knowledge of God didn't bring a person salvation, then how can God be justified in condemning him?” The answer is really quite simple. If a person lives up to the limited light or revelation that God gives him or her, God will continue to give them more light (see Psalms 119:129-130), right up to the point of how to be justified by faith (see John 7:17). If a person does not live up to that limited light, God will not give him or her any more light (see Romans 1:28). People are held responsible for how they respond to the light they have already received about God.

2. (vs. 22). In this verse Paul went on to say “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.” The unsaved are self-deceived. “Professing” or affirming that they are “wise,” they are actually “fools.” The Greek word translated “became fools” comes from the noun “moros” from which we get our English word “moron.” The pagans’ or unsaved were “fools” in the sense of those mentioned in Luke 12:20 and Psalms 14:1. **Note:** Unfortunately, this describes our own time as well. Otherwise intelligent people because of pride reject the truth of God and replace it with their own self-serving foolish speculations, and then they praise themselves for their brilliance. Such arrogance invites
the wrath of God. It is insane to look at creation and not conclude that there must be a Creator-God responsible for it all. Creation didn’t just happen by accident! The most incredible thing is that people who don’t believe in God will not worship and honor Him but they will worship and honor images of His creatures instead.

C. Mankind practicing idolatry (Romans 1:23). Continuing his statement from the previous verse, Paul said in this verse “And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.” Those foolish people Paul just referred to “changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man.” In other words, ungodly men changed the glory of God who is “uncorruptible” or immortal, into images or likenesses of “corruptible” or mortal man. Also, the eternal immortal Creator was replaced with images of mere creatures “birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things” who received the worship that only God deserves. Idolatry is the height of utter foolishness (see Isaiah 2:8; 44:9-20). Yet when people reject God they naturally replace Him with literal images, man-made ideas, or even self-worship. Note: At Athens Paul saw countless statues that depicted gods; in fact, one statue was dedicated to an unknown god, so that no god would be overlooked (see Acts 17:22-23). Such idolatry is the result of vain imaginations. God’s Word
forbids making images or a representation of God (see Exodus 20:4), because any image would misrepresent Him. The one true God cannot be contained in a building (see 1 Kings 8:27). No statue can depict Him, for He is everywhere and invisible (see Psalms 139:7-10; John 4:24), as well as infinite and eternal. For sure, nothing that God created is like Him physically (see Isaiah 40:18). The revelation of God in creation was enough to tell people that they were worshiping perishable, created things instead of the eternal Creator, who preceded everything that He made.

V. EXECUTION OF GOD’S WRATH (Romans 1:28-32).

After establishing that the ungodly are worthy of judgment the Apostle Paul focused on the execution of God’s wrath. Very often when we think of God’s wrath and judgment we may be reminded of God’s destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (see Genesis chapter 19), Elijah calling down fire from heaven to kill 102 soldiers (see II Kings 1:1-12), or some other supernatural act of judgment. But the truth is, such obvious expressions of God’s divine wrath are somewhat rare in the Old Testament and even more so in the New Testament. However, God’s wrath is being revealed in what we might call a strange way. Romans 1:24-27 is not part of our text, but in verse 24, Paul stated the consequences of man’s rejection of God. First, Paul declared that God’s wrath was shown in giving them up to their “uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to
dishonor their own bodies between themselves” (see Romans 1:24). Second, He gave them up to “vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet” (see Romans 1:26-27). This is where the remainder of our lesson begins.

A. God abandons the ungodly to a depraved mind (Romans 1:28). In this verse Paul went on to say “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.” The phrase “even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge” means that since the ungodly didn’t see fit to acknowledge God or consider Him worth knowing (as their Creator), He “gave them over to a reprobate mind.” A “reprobate mind” refers to a depraved mind or a depraved way of thinking. Genesis 6:5 describes this type of depraved thinking as being continually set on doing evil. The phrase “gave them over” means that God abandoned them to do whatever they wanted. Note: This giving over to a depraved way of thinking was and is an active expression of God’s wrath. In other words, God shows His wrath by releasing the ungodly from His restraints and allowing them to sin even more often and more wickedly. The fact is that the freedom God gives sinful man to sin without earthly consequences is in itself God’s judgment. Instead of protecting the ungodly
from their depravity, He allowed them to feel the full blast of their sin. He gave them over to sin’s degenerative tendencies. Paul ended this verse declaring that God gave the ungodly over to a depraved mind “to do those things which are not to do those things which are not convenient.” This refers to actions that are not fitting or becoming. In the next three verses, Paul gives a long list of some of those sins the ungodly commit that he describes as “not convenient.” We may wonder why our world is in the shape that it’s in. Well, the answer is that people have turned their backs on God, and He has justly and rightly turned them over to their own depravity.

B. God abandons the ungodly to their depraved acts (Romans 1:29-30).

1. (vs. 29). In this verse, Paul begins to list some of the depraved acts that God gave up the ungodly to do. He said “Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers.” Declaring that the ungodly were freed by God to act as if he didn’t exist, Paul identified those acts of depravity as first “Being filled with all unrighteousness” indicating that the ungodly have no desire to act righteously. Then Paul began his list of unrighteous acts with “fornication” which refers to various sexual sins. “Wickedness” is a general term for all evil behavior. “Covetousness” refers to excessive desires or envy. “Maliciousness” connotes a desire to
injure or hurt someone. “Envy” is displeasure over another person’s success, and it can lead to other evil acts, even “murder” which is next on Paul’s list. “Debate” here refers to strife or contention not to a healthy exchange of ideas. “Deceit” means misleading someone through lies. “Malicious” refers to scheming to hurt others. “Whisperers” are gossips.

2. (vs. 30). Paul continues his list in this verse adding “Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents.” Paul’s list of evils committed by the ungodly included “Backbiters.” This refers to those who attack the reputations of others in their absence. “Haters of God” are those who do everything that God hates. Every sin has in it a hatred of God; but some sinners are more open and avowed enemies to Him than others (Zechariah 11:8). The “despiteful” are those who cast insults on others. The “proud” are those who are arrogant or stuck-up. “Boasters” are impostors who falsely brag on themselves. “Inventors of evil things” are imaginative sinners who are not satisfied with the same old sins, but think of new areas of wickedness. “Disobedient to parents” reminds us of God’s command for children to honor their parents (see Exodus 20:12). Even this sacred duty is ignored by the ungodly who reject the Creator. Committing this sin can undermine society’s foundation: the home.

C. God abandons the ungodly to their depraved character (Romans 1:31). In this
verse the Apostle includes “Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.” Paul goes on to say that the ungodly, or depraved sinners are “without understanding.” This means that the ungodly cannot bring facts together to make a logical decision. This may not be a sin, but the ungodly are often guilty of this which can lead them to sin. “Covenantbreakers” are those who disregard or don’t take solemn agreements seriously. Their promises mean nothing. Since they reject God, they have no sanctified conscience to hold them accountable. “Without natural affection” applies to those who have no love for family or kindred. Those who are guilty of this sin will put marriage partners and children aside so that they can fulfill their selfish passions. “Implacable” means to be unwilling to come to agreement with others. The last sin in this list is “unmerciful” which means to show no pity or compassion to those in need. Note: Paul gave us a long list of evils that humans are capable of committing when they are apart from God. Unfortunately, there are many more sins that the Apostle could have included. Of course, not every person will practice all of these sins, but the one who willfully rejects the clear revelation of God and refuses to acknowledge Him is capable of every one of these sins and according to verse 28, they have been released by God to practice them. Notice that there is no mention of failure to attend church. This is not about organized religion. This concerns the truth about God as He is revealed through the conscience and the natural world.
D. God abandons the ungodly to their depraved intentions (Romans 1:32). In our final verse Paul went on to say that the ungodly “Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.” The word “Who” refers to the ungodly who commit the range of sins Paul just listed. The phrase, “Who knowing the judgment of God” means that the ungodly are fully aware that God judges sin. The Greek word for “judgment” refers to an ordinance that reveals a righteous standard (see Luke 1:6; Hebrews 9:1, 10). The heathen or ungodly world had enough revelation of God to know what His standards were. Knowing that sin will be judged, the ungodly also know that “they which commit such things are worthy of death.” But even knowing this, the ungodly still put their sins on display. The phrase “not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them” means that the ungodly not only commit these sins, but they are also pleased by those who follow them in their sins. The ultimate evil of depravity is taking pleasure in teaching others about sin. Not only are individuals guilty of sin, but they also purposefully lead others down the path of sin (see Matthew 23:15).

VI. Conclusion. This week’s lesson has taught us, first that men have an inner knowledge from
God of the reality of sin; secondly, that men have a consciousness that God must hate and judge sin; thirdly, that men continue in the ways of sin in spite of the warning of their own conscience; fourth, that they come to the point where they condone, then approve, then aid and abet, then rejoice in the sin of others; and finally that they soon come to the place where they practice sin rather than the righteousness of God. Few biblical passages are as condemning of unbelievers and the ungodly as this one we’ve discussed today. History’s testimony is that every generation since Paul’s day had violated God’s holy laws. Only in the gospel is God’s righteousness available to sinful men. Only by faith in Jesus Christ can condemned men be saved. This gospel message, God’s clear truth needs to be explained to sinner so that they will no longer ignore it. Holding and honoring the truth of God’s “eternal power and Godhead” (see Romans 1:20) will never be popular in our world. Any attempt to bring people to this truth that God has revealed to them internally and externally will be met with resistance. We must remember that ridicule will come. However, at the end of this life we should desire to be found having honored God’s clearly revealed truth instead of having ignored it.

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