

Rom 1:18 -

For - This word denotes that the apostle is about to give a reason for what he had just said. This verse commences the argument of the Epistle. an argument designed to establish the proposition advanced in [Rom_1:17](#). The proposition is, that God's plan of justification is revealed in the gospel. To show this, it was necessary to show that all other plans had failed; and that there was need of some new plan or scheme to save people. To this he devotes this and the two following chapters. The design of this argument is, to show that people were sinners. And in order to make this out, it was necessary to show that they were under law. This was clear in regard to the Jews. They had the Scriptures; and the apostle in this chapter shows that it was equally clear in regard to the Gentiles, and then proceeds to show that both had failed of obeying the Law. To see this clearly it is necessary to add only, that there can be but two ways of justification conceived of; one by obedience to law, and the other by grace. The former was the one by which Jews and Gentiles had sought to be justified; and if it could be shown that in this they had failed, the way was clear to show that there was need of some other plan.

The wrath of God - . The word rendered "wrath" properly denotes that earnest appetite or desire by which we seek anything, or an intense effort to obtain it. And it is particularly applied to the desire which a man has to take vengeance who is injured, and who is enraged. It is thus synonymous with revenge. [Eph_4:31](#), "let all bitterness, and wrath, etc.;" [Col_3:8](#), "anger, wrath, malice," etc.; [1Ti_2:8](#); [Jam_1:19](#). But it is also often applied to God; and it is clear that when we think of the word as applicable to him, it must be divested of everything like human passion, and especially of the passion of revenge. As he cannot be injured by the sins of people [Job_25:6](#), he has no motive for vengeance properly so called, and it is one of the most obvious rules of interpretation that we are not to apply to God passions and feelings which, among us, have their origin in evil.

In making a revelation, it was indispensable to use words which people used; but it does not follow that when applied to God they mean precisely what they do when applied to man. When the Saviour is said [Mar_3:5](#) to have looked on his disciples with anger (Greek, "wrath," the same word is here), it is not to be supposed that he had the feelings of an implacable man seeking vengeance. The nature of the feeling is to be judged of by the character of the person. So, in this place, the word denotes the "divine displeasure" or "indignation" against sin; the divine purpose to "inflict punishment. It is the opposition of the divine character against sin;" and the determination of the divine mind to express that opposition in a proper way, by excluding the offender from the favors which he bestows on the righteous. It is not an unamiable, or arbitrary principle of conduct. We all admire the character of a father who is opposed to disorder, and vice, and disobedience in his family, and who expresses his opposition in a proper way.

We admire the character of a ruler who is opposed to all crime in the community, and who expresses those feelings in the laws. And the more he is opposed to vice and crime, the more we admire his character and his laws; and why shall we be not equally pleased with God, who is opposed to all crime in all parts of the universe, and who determines to express it in the proper way for the sake of preserving order and promoting peace? The phrase "divine displeasure" or "indignation," therefore, expresses the meaning of this phrase; see [Mat_3:7](#); [Luk_3:7](#); [Luk_21:23](#); [Joh_3:36](#); [Rom_2:5](#), [Rom_2:8](#); [Rom_3:5](#); [Rom_4:15](#); [Rom_5:9](#); [Rom_9:22](#); [Rom_12:19](#); [Rom_13:4-5](#); [Eph_2:3](#); [Eph_5:6](#); [1Th_1:10](#); [1Th_2:16](#), etc. The word occurs 35 times in the New Testament.

Is revealed - That is, revealed to the Jews by their Law; and to the Gentiles in their reason, and conscience, as the apostle proceeds to show.

From heaven - This expression I take to mean simply that the divine displeasure against sin is made known by a divine appointment; by an arrangement of events, communications, and arguments, which evince that they have had their origin in heaven; or are divine. How this is, Paul proceeds to state,

in the works of creation, and in the Law which the Hebrews had. A variety of meanings have been given to this expression, but this seems the most satisfactory. It does not mean that the wrath will be sent from heaven; or that the heavens declare his wrath; or that the heavenly bodies are proofs of his wrath against sin; or that Christ, the executioner of wrath, will be manifest from heaven (Origen, Cyril, Beza, etc.); or that it is from God who is in heaven; but that it is by an arrangement which shows that it had its origin in heaven. or has proofs that it is divine.

Against all ungodliness - This word properly means "impiety" toward God, or neglect of the worship and honor due to him. asebeian. It refers to the fact that people had failed to honor the true God, and had paid to idols the homage which was due to him. Multitudes also in every age refuse to honor him, and neglect his worship, though they are not idolaters. Many people suppose that if they do not neglect their duty to their fellow-men, if they are honest and upright in their dealings, they are not guilty, even though they are not righteous, or do not do their duty to God; as though it were a less crime to dishonor God than man; and as though it were innocence to neglect and disobey our Maker and Redeemer. The apostle here shows that the wrath of God is as really revealed against the neglect of God as it is against positive iniquity; and that this is an offence of so much consequence as to be placed "first," and as deserving the divine indignation more than the neglect of our duties toward people; compare [Rom_11:26](#); [2Ti_2:16](#); [Tit_2:12](#); [Jud_1:15](#), [Jud_1:18](#). The word does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament.

Unrighteousness of men - Unrighteousness, or iniquity toward people. All offences against our neighbor, our parents. our country, etc. The word "ungodliness" includes all crimes against God; this, all crimes against our fellow-men. The two words express what comprehends the violation of all the commands of God; "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, etc. and thy neighbor as thyself," [Mat_22:37-40](#). The wrath of God is thus revealed against all human wickedness.

Who hold the truth - Who "keep back," or "restrain" the truth. The word translated "hold" here, sometimes means to "maintain," to "keep," to "observe" [1Co_7:30](#); [2Co_6:12](#); but it also means to "hold back, to detain, to hinder." [Luk_4:42](#), "the people sought him (Jesus), and came to him, and stayed him." (Greek, the same as here.) [Phm_1:13](#), "whom I would have "retained" with me," etc.; [2Th_2:6](#), "and now ye know what "withholdeth," etc. In this place it means also that they held back, or restrained the truth, by their wickedness.

The truth - The truth of God, in whatever way made known, and particularly, as the apostle goes on to say, what is made known by the light of nature. The truth pertaining to his perfections, his Law, etc. They hold it back. or restrain its influence.

In unrighteousness - Or rather, by their iniquity. Their wickedness is the cause why the truth had had so little progress among them, and had exerted so little influence. This was done by their yielding to corrupt passions and propensities, and by their being therefore unwilling to retain the knowledge of a pure and holy God, who is opposed to such deeds, and who will punish them. As they were determined to practice iniquity, they chose to exclude the knowledge of a pure God, and to worship impure idols, by which they might give a sanction to their lusts. Their vice and tendency to iniquity was, therefore, the reason why they had so little knowledge of a holy God; and by the love of this, they held back the truth from making progress, and becoming diffused among them.

The same thing is substantially true now. People hold back or resist the truth of the gospel by their sins in the following ways.

(1) People of influence and wealth employ both, in directly opposing the gospel.

(2) People directly resist the doctrines of religion. since they know they could not hold to those doctrines without abandoning their sins.

(3) People who resolve to live in sin, of course, resist the gospel, and endeavor to prevent its influence.

(4) Pride, and vanity, and the love of the world also resist the gospel, and oppose its advances.

(5) Unlawful business - business that begins in evil, and progresses, and ends in evil - has this tendency to hold back the gospel. Such is the effect of the traffic in ardent spirits, in the slave-trade, etc. They begin in the love of money, the root of all evil [1Ti_6:10](#); they progress in the tears and sorrows of the widow, the orphan, the wife, the sister, or the child; and they end in the deep damnation of multitudes in the world to come. Perhaps there has been nothing that has so much held back the influence of truth, and of the gospel, as indulgence in the vice of intemperance, and traffic in liquid fire.

(6) Indulgence in vice, or wickedness of any kind, holds back the truth of God. People who are resolved to indulge their passions will not yield themselves to this truth. And hence, all the wicked, the proud, and vain, and worldly are responsible, not only for their own sins directly, but for hindering, by their example and their crimes, the effect of religion on others. They are answerable for standing in the way of God and his truth; and for opposing him in the benevolent design of doing good to all people. There is nothing that prevents the universal spread and influence of truth but sin. And people of wickedness are answerable for all the ignorance and wo which are spread over the community, and which have extended themselves over the world.

Rom 1:19 -

Because - The apostle proceeds to show how it was that the pagan hindered the truth by their iniquity. This he does by showing that the truth might be known by the works of creation; and that nothing but their iniquity prevented it.

That which may be known of God - That which is "knowable" concerning God. The expression implies that there may be many things concerning God which cannot be known. But there are also many things which may be ascertained. Such are his existence, and many of his attributes, his power, and wisdom, and justice, etc. The object of the apostle was not to say that every thing pertaining to God could be known by them, or that they could have as clear a view of him as if they had possessed a revelation. We must interpret the expression according to the object which he had in view. That was to show that so much might be known of God as to prove that they had no excuse for their crimes; or that God would be just in punishing them for their deeds. For this, it was needful only that his existence and his justice, or his determination to punish sin, should be known; and this, the apostle affirms, was known among them, and had been from the creation of the world. This expression, therefore, is not to be pressed as implying that they knew all that could be known about God, or that they knew as much as they who had a revelation; but that they knew enough to prove that they had no excuse for their sins.

Is manifest - Is known; is understood.

In them - "Among" them. So the preposition "in" is often used. It means that they had this knowledge; or it had been communicated to them. The great mass of the pagan world was indeed ignorant of the true God; but their leaders, or their philosophers, had this knowledge; see the note at [Rom 1:21](#). But this was not true of the mass, or body of the people. Still it was true that this knowledge was in the possession of man, or was "among" the pagan world, and would have spread, had it not been for the love of sin.

God hath showed it to them - Compare [Joh 1:9](#). He had endowed them with reason and conscience [Rom 2:14-15](#); he had made them capable of seeing and investigating his works; he had spread before them the proofs of his wisdom, and goodness, and power, and had thus given them the means of learning his perfections and will.

Rom 1:20 -

For the invisible things of him - The expression "his invisible things" refers to those things which cannot be perceived by the senses. It does not imply that there are any things pertaining to the divine character which may be seen by the eye; but that there are things which may be known of him, though not discoverable by the eye. We judge of the objects around us by the senses, the sight, the touch, the ear, etc. Paul affirms, that though we cannot judge thus of God, yet there is a way by which we may come to the knowledge of him. What he means by the invisible things of God he specifies at the close of the verse, "his eternal power and Godhead." The affirmation extends only to that; and the argument implies that that was enough to leave them without any excuse for their sins.

From the creation of the world - The word "creation" may either mean the "act" of creating, or more commonly it means "the thing created," the world, the universe. In this sense it is commonly used in the New Testament; compare [Mar 10:6](#); [Mar 13:19](#); [Mar 16:5](#); [Rom 1:25](#); [2Co 5:17](#); [Gal 6:15](#); [Col 1:15](#), [Col 1:23](#); [Heb 4:13](#); [Heb 9:11](#); [1Pe 2:13](#); [2Pe 3:4](#); [Rev 3:14](#). The word "from" may mean "since," or it may denote "by means of." And the expression here may denote that, as an historical fact, God "has been" "known" since the act of creation; or it may denote that he is known "by means of" the material universe which he has formed. The latter is doubtless the true meaning. For,

- (1) This is the common meaning of the word "creation;" and,
- (2) This accords with the design of the argument.

It is not to state an historical fact, but to show that they had the means of knowing their duty within their reach, and were without excuse. Those means were in the wisdom, power, and glory of the universe, by which they were surrounded.

Are clearly seen - Are made manifest; or may be perceived. The word used here does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament.

Being understood - His perfections may be investigated, and comprehended by means of his works. They are the evidences submitted to our intellects, by which we may arrive at the true knowledge of God.

Things that are made - By his works; compare [Heb 11:3](#). This means, not by the original "act" of creation, but by the continual operations of God in his Providence, by his doings, masin, by what he is continually producing and accomplishing in the displays of his power and goodness in the heavens and the earth. What they were capable of understanding, he immediately adds, and shows that he did not intend to affirm that everything could be known of God by his works; but so much as to free them from excuse for their sins.

His eternal power - Here are two things implied.

- (1) That the universe contains an exhibition of his power, or a display of that attribute which we call "omnipotence;" and,
- (2) That this power has existed from eternity, and of course implies an eternal existence in God.

It does not mean that this power has been exerted or put forth from eternity, for the very idea of creation supposes that it had not, but that there is proof, in the works of creation, of power which must have existed from eternity, or have belonged to an eternal being. The proof of this was clear, even to the pagan, with their imperfect views of creation and of astronomy; compare [Psa 19:1-14](#). The majesty and grandeur of the heavens would strike their eye, and be full demonstration that they were the work of an infinitely great and glorious God. But to us, under the full blaze of modern science, with our knowledge of the magnitude, and distances, and revolutions of the heavenly bodies,

the proof of this power is much more grand and impressive. We may apply the remark of the apostle to the present state of the science, and his language will cover all the ground, and the proof to human view is continually rising of the amazing power of God, by every new discovery in science, and especially in astronomy. Those who wish to see this object presented in a most impressive view, may find it done in Chalmer's Astronomical Discourses, and in Dick's Christian Philosopher. Equally clear is the proof that this power must have been eternal. If it had not always existed, it could in no way have been produced. But it is not to be supposed that it was always exerted, any more than it is that God now puts forth all the power that he can, or than that we constantly put forth all the power which we possess. God's power was called forth at the creation. He showed his omnipotence; and gave, by that one great act, eternal demonstration that he was almighty; and we may survey the proof of that, as clearly as if we had seen the operation of his hand there. The proof is not weakened because we do not see the process of creation constantly going on. It is rather augmented by the fact that he sustains all things, and controls continually the vast masses of matter in the material worlds.

Godhead - His deity; divinity; divine nature, or essence. The word is not used elsewhere in the New Testament. Its meaning cannot therefore be fixed by any parallel passages. It proves the truth that the supremacy, or supreme divinity of God, was exhibited in the works of creation, or that he was exalted above all creatures and things. It would not be proper, however, to press this word as implying that all that we know of God by revelation was known to the pagan; but that so much was known as to show his supremacy; his right to their homage; and of course the folly and wickedness of idolatry. This is all that the argument of the apostle demands, and, of course, on this principle the expression is to be interpreted.

So that they are without excuse - God has given them so clear evidence of his existence and claims, that they have no excuse for their idolatry, and for hindering the truth by their iniquity. It is implied here that in order that people should be responsible, they should have the means of knowledge; and that he does not judge them when their ignorance is involuntary, and the means of knowing the truth have not been communicated. But where people have these means within their reach, and will not avail themselves of them, all excuse is taken away. This was the case with the Gentile world. They had the means of knowing so much of God, as to show the folly of worshipping dumb idols; compare [Isa 44:8-10](#). They had also traditions respecting his perfections; and they could not plead for their crimes and folly that they had no means of knowing him. If this was true of the pagan world then, how much more is it true of the world now?

And especially how true and fearful is this, respecting that great multitude in Christian lands who have the Bible, and who never read it; who are within the reach of the sanctuary, and never enter it; who are admonished by friends, and by the providences of God, and who regard it not; and who look upon the heavens, and even yet see no proof of the eternal power and Godhead of him who made them all! Nay, there are those who are apprized of the discoveries of modern astronomy, and who yet do not seem to reflect that all these glories are proof of the existence of an eternal God; and who live in ignorance of religion as really as the pagan, and in crimes as decided and malignant as disgraced the darkest ages of the world. For such there is no excuse, or shadow of excuse, to be offered in the day of doom. And there is no fact more melancholy in our history, and no one thing that more proves the stupidity of people, than this sad forgetfulness of Him that made the heavens, even amid all the wonders and glories that have come fresh from the hand of God, and that everywhere speak his praise.

Romans 1:21

because that - The apostle here is showing that it was right to condemn people for their sins. To do this it was needful to show them that they had the knowledge of God, and the means of knowing what was right; and that the true source of their sins and idolatries was a corrupt and evil heart.

When they knew God - Greek, "knowing God." That is, they had an acquaintance with the existence and many of the perfections of one God. That many of the philosophers of Greece and Rome had a knowledge of one God, there can be no doubt. This was undoubtedly the case with Pythagoras, who had traveled extensively in Egypt, and even in Palestine; and also with Plato and his disciples. This point is clearly shown by Cudworth in his *Intellectual System*, and by Dr. Warburton in the *Divine Legation of Moses*. Yet the knowledge of this great truth was not communicated to the people. It was confined to the philosophers; and not improbably one design of the mysteries celebrated throughout Greece was to keep up the knowledge of the one true God. Gibbon has remarked that "the philosophers regarded all the popular superstitions as equally false: the common people as equally true; and the politicians as equally useful." This was probably a correct account of the prevalent feelings among the ancients. A single extract from "Cicero" (*de Natura Deorum*, lib. ii. c. 6) will show that they had the knowledge of one God. "There is something in the nature of things, which the mind of man, which reason, which human power cannot effect; and certainly what produces this must be better than man. What can this be called but "God?" Again (c. 2), "What can be so plain and manifest, when we look at heaven, and contemplate heavenly things, as that there is some divinity of most excellent mind, by which these things are governed?"

They glorified him not as God - They did not "honor" him as God. This was the true source of their abominations. To glorify him "as God" is to regard with proper reverence all his perfections and laws; to venerate his name, his power, his holiness, and presence, etc. As they were not inclined to do this, so they were given over to their own vain and wicked desires. Sinners are not willing to give honor to God, as God. They are not pleased with his perfections; and therefore the mind becomes fixed on other objects, and the heart gives free indulgence to its own sinful desires. A willingness to honor God as God - to reverence, love, and obey him, would effectually restrain people from sin.

Neither were thankful - The obligation to be "thankful" to God for his mercies, for the goodness which we experience, is plain and obvious. Thus, we judge of favors received of our fellow-men. the apostle here clearly regards this unwillingness to render gratitude to God for his mercies as one of the causes of their subsequent corruption and idolatry. The reasons of this are the following.

- (1) The effect of ingratitude is to render the heart hard and insensible.
- (2) People seek to forget the Being to whom they are unwilling to exercise gratitude.
- (3) To do this, they fix their affections on other things; and hence, the pagan expressed their gratitude not to God, but to the sun, and moon, and stars, etc., the mediums by which God bestows his favors upon people. And we may here learn that an unwillingness to thank God for his mercies is one of the most certain causes of alienation and hardness of heart.

But became vain - To "become vain," with us, means to be elated, or to be self-conceited, or to seek praise from others. The meaning here seems to be, they became foolish, frivolous in their thoughts and reasonings. They acted foolishly; they employed themselves in useless and frivolous questions, the effect of which was to lead the mind further and further from the truth respecting God.

Imaginations - This word means properly "thoughts," then "reasonings," and also "disputations." Perhaps our word, "speculations," would convey its meaning here. It implies that they were unwilling to honor God, and being unwilling to honor him, they commenced those speculations which resulted in all their vain and foolish opinions about idols, and the various rites of idolatrous worship. Many of the speculations and inquiries of the ancients were among the most vain and senseless which the mind can conceive.

And their foolish heart - The word "heart" is not infrequently used to denote the mind, or the understanding. We apply it to denote the affections. But such was not its common use, among the Hebrews. We speak of the head when we refer to the understanding, but this was not the case with the Hebrews. They spoke of the heart in this manner, and in this sense it is clearly used in this place; see [Eph 1:18](#); [Rom 2:15](#); [2Co 4:6](#); [2Pe 1:19](#). The word "foolish" means literally what is without "understanding;" [Mat 15:16](#).

Was darkened - Was rendered obscure, so that they did not perceive and comprehend the truth. The process which is stated in this verse is,

- (1) That people had the knowledge of God.
- (2) That they refused to honor him when they knew him, and were opposed to his character and government.
- (3) That they were ungrateful.
- (4) That they then began to doubt, to reason, to speculate, and wandered far into darkness.

This is substantially the process by which people wander away from God now. They have the knowledge of God, but they do not love him; and being dissatisfied with his character and government, they begin to speculate, fall into error, and then "find no end in wandering mazes lost," and sink into the depths of heresy and of sin.

Rom 1:22 -

Professing themselves to be wise - This was the common boast of the philosophers of antiquity. The very word by which they chose to be called, "philosophers," means literally "lovers of wisdom." That it was their boast that they were wise, is well known; compare [Rom 1:14](#); [1Co 1:19](#), [1Co 1:20](#), [1Co 1:22](#); [1Co 3:19](#); [2Co 11:19](#).

They became fools - Compare [Jer 8:8-9](#). They became really foolish in their opinions and conduct. There is something particularly pungent and cutting in this remark, and as true as it is pungent. In what way they evinced their folly, Paul proceeds immediately to state. Sinners of all kinds are frequently spoken of as fools in the Scriptures. In the sense in which it is thus used, the word is applied to them as void of understanding or moral sense; as idolaters, and as wicked; [Psa 14:1](#); [Pro 26:4](#); [Pro 1:17](#), [Pro 1:22](#); [Pro 14:8-9](#). The senses in which this word here is applied to the pagan are,

- (1) That their speculations and doctrines were senseless; and,
- (2) That their conduct was corrupt.