

# THE MODES OF REVELATION

PART 2: ROMANS 1 & NATURAL REVELATION



# Romans 1 and Natural Revelation

- ▶ Psalm 19 had a profound impact on Pauline theology
- ▶ Paul's explanation of Israel's rejection of the gospel was based on David's explanation of natural revelation

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!' However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?' So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; **'Their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.'**

- Romans 10:14-18



# Romans 1 and Natural Revelation

- ▶ Paul's theology recognized man's moral accountability to God **through** natural revelation
- ▶ Romans 1:18-20 is where Paul develops the themes of Psalm 19
- ▶ The theme of the book of Romans is **the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel** (Rom 1:16-17)

“This righteousness of God in providing salvation, however, **presupposes** the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men (v. 18). Paul is concerned to indicate how this **wrath of God** can be **just**.”

- Millard Erickson



# 1. The Revelation of Divine Wrath

Vv. 16-17:  
Righteousness of God revealed  
in gospel through faith

**Verse 18**

For

the wrath of God → is revealed  
from heaven

- ▶ Vv. 16-17 contains Paul's thesis statement
- ▶ He then opens his first major argument with the word **for**
- ▶ This conjunction builds upon and gives a reason for the gospel



# 1. The Revelation of Divine Wrath

Vv. 16-17:  
Righteousness of God revealed  
in gospel through faith

Verse 18

For

the wrath of God → is revealed  
from heaven

The gospel is necessary **because** there is such a thing as the **wrath of God**, because only the gospel of salvation by grace through faith (vv. 16-17) brings **deliverance** from that wrath. Agar Beet perceptively remarks, 'the entire weight of vv. 16, 17, which contain a summary of the Epistle, rests upon the **assumption** that all men are, apart from the Gospel, **under the anger of God**.' This is the plight of **mankind**. Apart from this the **gospel has no meaning**. And since the wrath of God is being revealed against all sin, there can be **no way** of salvation other than the way that **deals** with that sin, that is, the **gospel**."

- Leon Morris



# 1. The Revelation of Divine Wrath

VV. 16-17:  
Righteousness of God revealed  
in gospel through faith

Verse 18

For

the wrath of God → is revealed  
from heaven

- ▶ “revealed” = *αποκαλύπτω*
- ▶ Present tense = progressive, ongoing action **in the present**
- ▶ Term appears 1 verse earlier
- ▶ But there, the subject was **the righteousness of God**
- ▶ The contrast between these two “revelations” is important



# 1. The Revelation of Divine Wrath

VV. 16-17:  
Righteousness of God revealed  
in gospel through faith

Verse 18

For

the wrath of God

is revealed

from heaven

- ▶ “wrath of God” = only time found in Romans
- ▶ 2 Greek terms normally translated as “wrath” or “anger”
- ▶ *θυμός* = uncontrolled rage
- ▶ *οργή* = anger which has built up over a long period of time

“The biblical writers **habitually** use for the divine wrath a word which denotes not so much a sudden flaring of passion which is soon over, as a **strong** and **settled opposition** to all that is evil arising out of **God’s very nature**.”

- Leon Morris



# 1. The Revelation of Divine Wrath

## But how is God's wrath revealed?

### God's wrath revealed cognitively

- ▶ Speaks of revealing the **truth** about God's wrath to the mind
- ▶ Barth argued that this occurs when preaching the **gospel**
- ▶ God's **wrath** against sin is revealed when the gospel is preached
- ▶ God's **righteousness** in the offering of forgiveness is revealed when preaching the gospel

### God's wrath revealed historically

- ▶ Verse 17 is talking about an historical **event**
- ▶ God's righteousness is revealed **historically** when Christ died and rose again
- ▶ It seems better to see Paul speaking of **another** historical revelation in verse 18
- ▶ What he's saying is that God's wrath has come into **historical reality**



# 1. The Revelation of Divine Wrath

## But how is God's wrath revealed historically?

- ▶ Even though God's wrath will be revealed in its **fullest** since in the future, that can't be what Paul is talking about here
- ▶ Some have suggested that Paul is referring to things like

**illness**

**death**

**the degenerative state of creation**

**the punishment for sin at the cross**

- ▶ But we get some clarity on Paul's intention by observing the **rest** of chapter 1
- ▶ We see this repeated phrase: "God gave them over..." (vv. 24, 26, 28)
- ▶ Each time, sinners are "given over" to their sin and all its various consequences

**"The history of the world is the judgment of the world"**

- Friedrich Schiller



# 1. The **Object** of Divine Wrath

VV. 16-17:  
Righteousness of God revealed  
in gospel through faith

**Verse 18**

For

the wrath of God → is revealed

from heaven

against all ungodliness

and  
unrighteousness

of men

Negates any kind of exclusion...**no sin**  
goes unnoticed or unpunished and  
God is equally outraged by **all sin**

The terms are all-encompassing...  
expressing the **totality** of man's  
sinfulness

"The wrath which is being revealed is  
no **nightmare** of an **indiscriminate**,  
**uncontrolled**, **irrational fury**, but the  
wrath of a **holy** and **merciful** God  
called forth by, and directed against,  
men's *ασέβεια* and *αδικαία*."

- C.E.B. Cranfield

Genitive of product:  
"ungodliness and unrighteousness **produced by** men"

or

Attributed genitive:  
"**ungodly** and **unrighteous** men"



# 1. The **Object** of Divine Wrath

VV. 16-17:  
Righteousness of God revealed  
in gospel through faith

**Verse 18**

For

the wrath of God → is revealed

from heaven

against all ungodliness

and

unrighteousness

} of men

“to hold” or “to hold back”

In context: “to hide” or “hold down”

“Suppress is perhaps too strong. It implies that sinners are **successful**. Better is ‘hinder’ or the like. These people do not **like** the truth and do what they can to **oppose** it.”

- Leon Morris

suppress

in unrighteousness

the truth

who

Truth about God as **Creator, judge, and redeemer**, which hold man **accountable**



## 2. The **Object** of Divine Wrath

VV. 16-17:  
Righteousness of God revealed  
in gospel through faith

**Verse 18**

For

the wrath of God → is revealed

from heaven

against all ungodliness

and

unrighteousness

} of men

“to hold” or “to hold back”

In context: “to hide” or “hold down”

suppress

→ the truth

← who

in unrighteousness

Man intentionally tries to **bury** accountability to God through unrighteousness...whether consciously or unconsciously

Truth about God as **Creator, judge, and redeemer**, which hold man **accountable**

“For they exchanged the **truth of God** for a **lie** and worshiped and served the **creation** rather than the **creator**”

Romans 1:25



## 2. The **Object** of Divine Wrath

### **Summary**

- ▶ God's settled, determined wrath is revealed historically in his abandonment of mankind to sin and its consequences
- ▶ God's wrath is revealed against mankind's ungodliness and unrighteousness
- ▶ Mankind is guilty of attempting to hide the truth of God by practicing unrighteousness

### **Questions remaining at the end of verse 18**

- ▶ Is God's wrath justified?
- ▶ How can man know the truth that they supposedly suppress?
- ▶ Why would man suppress the truth about God to begin with?



# 3. The Basis of Divine Wrath

## THE CLARITY OF THE MESSAGE



But how is the message plain? How can we know it's been communicated clearly?



# 3. The Basis of Divine Wrath

## THE CLARITY OF THE MESSAGE

Verse 19 because

what can be known about God → is plain  
among them

"It is not people's **innate ability** or **cunning** that enables them to rise to the knowledge of God. God can be known only as **he chooses** to make himself known."

- Leon Morris

for

God

made it plain

to them

But what is the message?  
What is **knowable** about God  
that man tries to suppress?

God is the actor—revelation  
is made at his initiation

God is the guarantor—his infinite perfection and  
power could not produce a message about  
himself that is unclear



# 3. The Basis of Divine Wrath

## THE **CONTENT** OF THE MESSAGE

Verse 20

For

**PARADOX:**  
Visible invisibleness?

His invisibleness

His eternal power  
divinity

is clearly visible

since the creation of the world  
being understood through what was made

Introduces the  
answer to the  
question of v. 19

- ▶ “invisibleness” = *αόρατος*
- ▶ “clearly visible” = *καθοράω*
- ▶ Common root = *οράω*, “to see”
- ▶ **But what does God’s “invisibleness” refer to?**
- ▶ Paul gives us the answer in the context

**“God is spirit...”**  
- John 4:24

**“No one has seen God at any time...”**  
- John 1:18

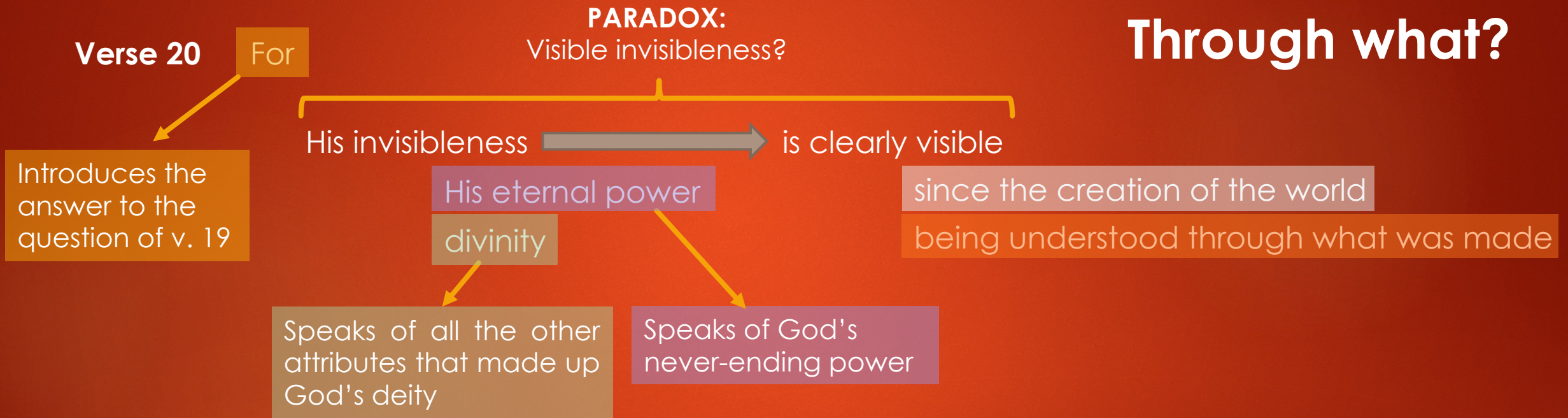
**“No man can see me and live!”**  
- Exodus 33:20



# 3. The Basis of Divine Wrath

## THE **CONTENT** OF THE MESSAGE

Since when?  
Through what?



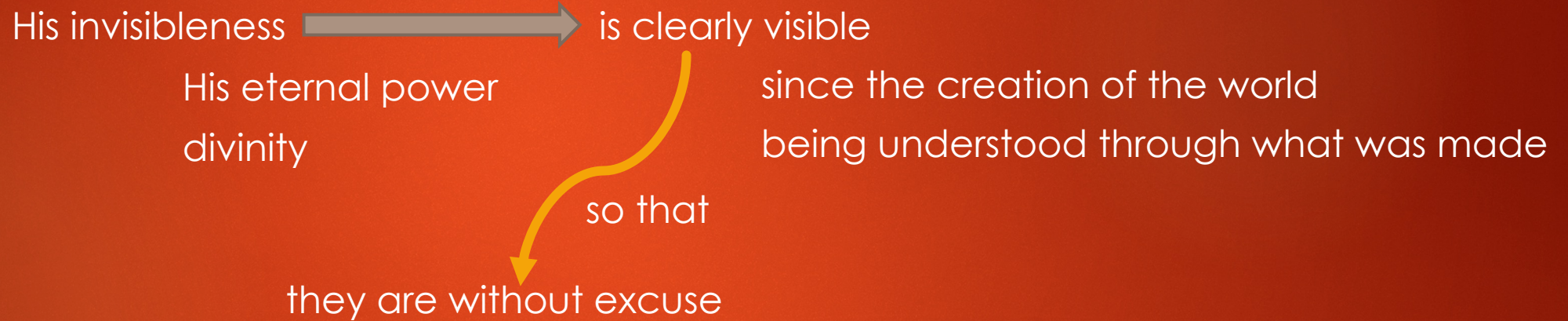
In other words, what can be known about God (v. 19) is his **power** and **divinity**, which God **clearly communicated** to humanity **from the beginning of creation** through **nature itself**.



# 3. The Basis of Divine Wrath

## THE **RESULT** OF THE MESSAGE

Verse 20 For



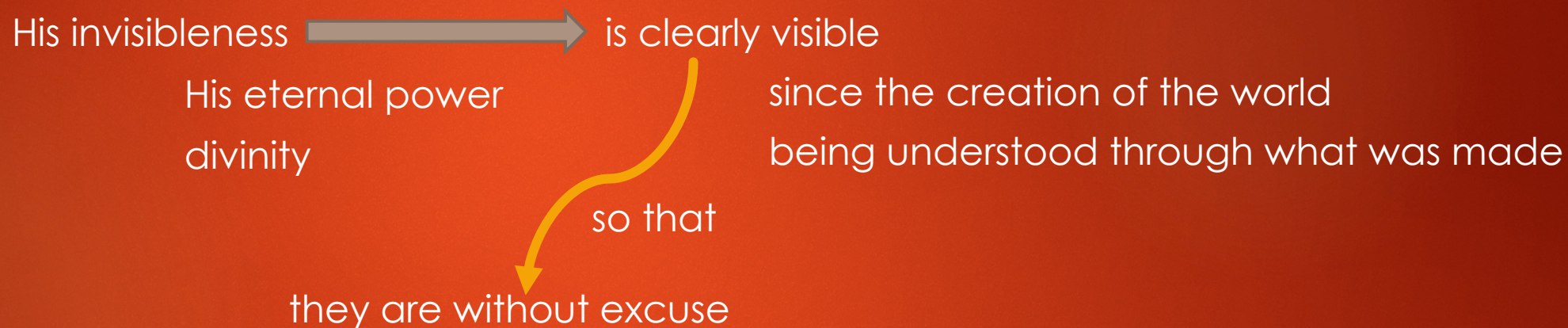
- ▶ God has provided a continuous, pervasive testimony of **himself** through nature
- ▶ Through the created order, man can truly **understand** God's invisible nature
- ▶ God has made this message **plain** to humanity
- ▶ Thus, the result is that mankind has **no excuse** for suppressing the truth about God



# 3. The Basis of Divine Wrath

## THE **RESULT** OF THE MESSAGE

Verse 20 For



- ▶ They do so **willingly** and in **full knowledge**, because they are **opposed** to this knowledge
- ▶ These facts makes God's wrath against man's sin fully justified



# Summary of Natural Revelation

- ▶ God has revealed his glory in the created order (Ps 19:1)
- ▶ It is **continuous** (Ps 19:1-2), and has existed since creation (Rom 1:20b)
- ▶ It is **universal** (Ps 19:3-6), transcending every possible barrier
- ▶ It is **limited** (Ps 19), communicating only certain knowledge to man
- ▶ It is **clear** (Rom 1:19), making God's invisible attributes known
- ▶ It is **rejected** (Rom 1:18), because it brings man under divine accountability
- ▶ It is **damning** (Rom 1:20) because it destroys man's excuse for his rebellion