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The Evidence Against the Pagan Gentile

1: 18-23

The evidence against the pagan Gentile DIG: What reasons does Paul give for the wrath of God against humanity? In what ways does God reveal Himself to people (also see Psalm 19:1; John 14:10 and 26; Acts 15:17; First Corinthians 2:13; John 5:13)? How does Paul say that some people have provoked God to anger? What two witnesses does God call as evidence against the pagan Gentile? How are they responsible to know God and are without excuse?

REFLECT: How does Paul describe your condition before you accepted Messiah as your Savior? When you meet people like this, how do you react? Do they make excuses? What stirs your righteous indignation? Are you out of control? Or do you express godly resolve? We will all be judged according to the light we have? How much light have you been given? What are you doing with it? How can you explain God's wrath to someone who believes all people are basically good? When has your freedom to resist God only ended up hurting you?

An atheist believes that God does not exist. A believer knows that God exists. One has an opinion, the other has knowledge.

We need to balance **God's** character and personality. Yes, **He** is loving and peaceful. But **He** is also **righteous** and cannot tolerate **sin**. And **His anger** is reflected in **His righteous** indignation. The need for a **gospel** arises from **God's anger** that has been revealed. The **righteousness** of **God is revealed** because **the anger** of **God is revealed**, showing **His anger** with **godlessness and wickedness**. Living as if **God** does not exist.



What is revealed is God's anger (Greek: *orge*, meaning *wrath*) **(1:18a)**. It is not popular these days to point out that **God** is a **God** of **wrath**. People would rather quote **First John 4:8**, "**God is love**," and look no further. But it is in the context of **God's** holiness, meaning *His hatred of sin*, and **His** justice, meaning *His dispensing the punishment that sin brings on oneself*, that **His love**, mercy and grace become so precious. The paradox of how **God** can be both just and merciful has been the theme of Jewish writing: **If you want the world to endure there can be no absolute justice, but if you want absolute justice, the world cannot endure (Genesis Rabbah 39:6)**. The solution to the paradox is **Yeshua's** atoning death, as summed up in **3:19-26** and **John 3:16**.

The anger of God is continuously being **revealed** because people keep on **sinning** (note the passive verb). **ADONAI's** delight is in **His mercy** (see the commentary on **Ruth, to see link click Af - The Concept of Chesed**), not in actively pouring out **wrath**. But the moral laws of the universe that **He** created are such that **Ha'Shem's anger** automatically goes on being **revealed** to those who do not obey **Him**.

Wrath is being **revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who in their wickedness keep suppressing the truth (1:18b)**. Legalists and atheists think they can become righteous by their own efforts without trusting. However, antinomians, who oppose the very notion of Torah observance, imagine they can have a good relationship with **God** while disobeying **His** mitzvot. Such people, lacking adequate moral restraints, can all too easily degenerate into **wickedness**.

Because what is known about God is plain to them, since God has made it plain to them (1:19). **The heavens declare the glory of God, the dome of the sky speaks the work of His hands. Every day it utters speech, every night it reveals knowledge** (see the commentary on **Genesis Lw - The Witness of the Stars**). Therefore, only **fools say in their hearts, "There is no God," They deal corruptly, their deeds are vile, not one**

does what is right (Psalm 14:1). They know the truth, but they suppress it by their godless living. Or as the prophet Isaiah put it centuries earlier: **Your own crimes separate you from God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He doesn't hear (Isaiah 59:2)**. In sum, since you already know enough to **trust God** and obey **Him**, you have no excuse.³³ **Thus, ADONAI will call two witnesses.**



The first witness is creation: For ever since the creation of the universe his invisible qualities — both his eternal power and his divine nature - have been clearly seen, because they can be understood from what he has made. Even in the most ancient times, long before the telescope and microscope were invented, the greatness of ADONAI was evident both in the vastness and in the tiny intricacies of nature. People could look at the stars and discover the fixed order of their orbits. They could observe a small seed reproduce itself into a giant tree, exactly like the one from which it came. They could see the marvelous cycles of the seasons, the rain, and the snow. They witnessed the wonder of human birth and the glory of the sunrise and sunset.³⁴ **Therefore, they have no excuse (1:20)**. That verdict stands over the people we meet every day just as much as over the people Paul rubbed shoulders with in the first century, and our urgency in communicating the gospel should be just as great as Paul's.³⁵

The principle here is that if a person responds to the light that they have, **God** will give them more light. In all cultures, at all times and places, humans have believed in the existence of a higher reality, a higher power, than themselves, and the human race collectively. So even if the native in the bush has never heard the gospel in the full and formal sense. No one is completely without the opportunity for salvation.³⁶ **Jeremiah** says it this way: **When you seek Me, you will find Me, provided you seek for Me wholeheartedly; and I will let you find Me, says ADONAI (Jeremiah 29:13-14a)**. No one will stand before **Yeshua** (see the commentary on **Revelation Fo - The Great White**

Throne Judgment) and say, “**You** are not fair! I never had a chance!” **God** is just and **God** is fair. **They** have all known **God** through **His creation**. And if **they** have not responded to the light given **them**, it is because **they** have suppressed the truth. Thus, **they** are responsible.

The second witness is conscience: For their lives show that the conduct the Torah dictates is written in their hearts, not just on stones (**Jeremiah 31:33b**). Their consciences also bear witness to this, for their conflicting thoughts sometimes accuse them if they are guilty and sometimes defend them if they are innocent (**2:15**). People recognize that they have an instinctive, built-in sense of right and wrong that activates guilt.

Because, although they know who God is, they do not glorify Him as God or thank Him for that which they have received from Him (**1:21a**). The unbelief of mankind is made worse by their ingratitude. Knowledge of God should lead to reverence and gratitude. Although God is the source of every good thing that mankind possesses - giving rain, sun, and other natural blessings to the just and unjust alike (**Matthew 5:45; Acts 14:15-17**), the unregenerate fails to thank Him because they fail to even acknowledge His existence. Instead of acknowledging God “as God,” by glorifying Him and thanking Him, human beings perverted their knowledge and sank further into idolatry.³⁷

The Pagan Gentile’s rationalization: On the contrary, they have become futile once God is eliminated from their thinking. This is the initial decision that produces the long downhill slide into sh’ol. Claiming to be wise, they have become fools! In rejecting ADONAI’s clear revelation of Himself through His creation, mankind failed to honor and glorify YHVH, failed to give Him thanks, became futile in the philosophical speculations, and became foolish and their undiscerning hearts have become darkened (**1:21b-22**). Trying to justify themselves, they rationalized their sin, just as fallen mankind still does today.

Centuries earlier, David had declared that those who deny Ha’Shem and His truth are fools (**Psalms 14:1** and **53:1**), and it is that very foolishness that deludes them into thinking they are wise. The pagan Gentile cannot think perfectly about anything. But his thinking is perverted most severely in the spiritual and divine realm, because that is where sinful rebellion is centered. These things are beyond his human perception and since he rejects revelation both in nature (see **1:19** above) and Scripture, he has no hope of coming to truth in himself. His foolish speculations therefore go the furthest astray when he philosophizes about his origin, purpose, and destiny, or the difference about the truly

beautiful and the monstrous, or between the temporary and the eternal.

In fact, not wanting to be held responsible to anyone for anything, **they have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for mere images, like a mortal human being, or like birds, animals or reptiles (1:23)! Paul** pictures the fall into idolatry as an “**exchange.**” Given the opportunity to bask in the glory of the immortal **God**, **they** have chosen, in **their foolishness**, to worship the mortal images of **themselves** and **beasts**. **They** became idolatrous, not out of pure ignorance, but because **they** rejected the knowledge of the truth that is readily available to them. Thus, as **1:24-31** will show, the whole dreadful parade of **sins** that plague **humanity** has its roots in the soil of idolatry.³⁸

*Dear loving **Heavenly Father**, **You** are wonderful! Eternity is forever! Please give me wisdom how to lovingly guide my friends and family to **love You**. May I be filled with courage and sensitivity so that I effectively share **Your love** and truth with my friends and family. May **You** bring into their lives, others who also share with them about the eternal peace and joy (**Revelation 21:4**) that **You** want to give them when they follow **You** as their **Lord and Savior (John 1:12; Acts 16:31)**. May they be filled with peace as they trust **Yeshua** as the only way to **God**. **Yeshua said to him: I am the way, the truth, and the life! No one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14:6)**.*

*They have only one lifetime to make this important choice (**Hebrews 9:27**). Life ends so quickly for many who thought they had many years yet to live, but due to the worldwide pandemic, lives are cut short. Please open their hearts to rejoice in seeing that **Yeshua, God’s sacrificial Lamb (First Corinthians 5:7)** paid the penalty for our **sins** so **He** could give **God’s** righteousness to all who **love** and follow **Him**. **He made the One who knew no sin to become a sin offering on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (Second Corinthians 5:21)**. **Yeshua** our **Messiah**, rose in victory - conquering **death (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20)**!*

*May the eyes of their hearts (**Ephesians 1:18**) see you as **the Risen Savior** who is in **heaven** preparing a place for those who **love** and follow **Him**. **Do not let your heart be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me. In My Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to Myself, so that where I am you may also be (John 14:1-3)**.*

*May the sure hope of **heaven** for all who **love You**, move them to eternal joy and peace as they trust in your sure promise of eternal life in **heaven**, “**Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was***



no more . . . They shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them and be their God. He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Nor shall there be mourning or crying or pain any longer, for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:1, 3c-4) for all who love You now. In the holy name of Yeshua and His power of resurrection. Amen