

Romans 2:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth,
but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath,

Analysis

But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—ἐριθεία (eritheia, "contentiousness/selfish ambition") describes factious self-will, resisting God's authority. The contrast ἀπειθοῦσι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ (apeithusi tē alētheia, "disobey the truth") versus πειθομένοις δὲ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ (peithomenois de tē adikia, "obeying unrighteousness") shows that rejecting truth involves active embrace of evil, not mere neutrality. Ἀλήθεια (alētheia, "truth") in Paul means gospel reality, not abstract philosophy.

Indignation and wrath—ὀργὴ καὶ θυμός (orgē kai thymos). Θυμός (thymos) is passionate anger or fury; ὀργή (orgē) is settled wrath. Together they emphasize God's fierce opposition to rebellion. This verse demolishes the modern sentimentality that sees God's love as excluding judgment. Scripture consistently presents divine wrath as love's necessary corollary—God's opposition to evil that destroys His beloved image-bearers.

The parallelism with verse 7 is exact: patient continuance versus contentious rebellion, seeking truth versus obeying unrighteousness, eternal life versus indignation and wrath. Paul constructs an inescapable binary: no neutral ground exists. Jesus made identical claims in John 3:36: "he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Historical Context

Paul's audience, steeped in Old Testament prophets, knew God's wrath intimately: the Flood, Sodom, wilderness wanderings, exile to Babylon. Prophets like Nahum (1:2-6) and Zephaniah (1:14-18) vividly described divine fury against rebellion. However, Jews often projected this wrath onto Gentiles while presuming immunity. Paul's rhetoric here is egalitarian: wrath falls on all who disobey truth, regardless of ethnicity. This challenged the presumption that covenant membership created a wrath shield.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. In what areas of my life do I 'obey unrighteousness'—compromise with sin—while professing to obey truth?
2. How does understanding God's wrath as righteous opposition to evil deepen my gratitude for Christ bearing it in my place?
3. What 'contentious' attitudes—resisting correction, defending sin—reveal an unrepentant heart?

Interlinear Text

τοῖς	δὲ	ἐξ	ἐριθείας	καὶ	ἀπειθοῦσιν	
G3588	But	unto them that are contentious	G2052	and	do not obey	
	G1161	G1537		G2532	G544	
μὲν	τῇ	ἀληθείᾳ	πειθομένοις	δὲ	τῇ	ἀδικίᾳ
G3303	G3588	the truth	obey	But	G3588	unrighteousness
		G225	G3982	G1161		G93
θυμός	καὶ	ὀργή				
indignation	and	wrath				
G2372	G2532	G3709				

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 16:19 (Judgment): And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

1 Peter 4:17 (Judgment): For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?