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The Wrath of God, Part 2

Romans 1:18, “For the wrath of God¹ is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”¹

Today we pick up where we left off last time, looking at Romans 1:18. For the next three chapters; from Romans 1:18-3:20, 64 verses, Paul gives himself to a discussion of The Wrath of God of which verse 18 is his introduction. Now, I am going to wrap up Paul’s introduction.

Idolatry

Isaiah describes the utter folly of idolatry when he writes, speaking of the idolater:

Isaiah 44:14b-17, “He plants a fir, and the rain makes it grow. Then it becomes something for a man to burn, so he takes one of them [a part of the tree] and warms himself; he also makes a fire to bake bread. He also makes a god and worships it; he makes it a graven image, and falls down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire; over this half he eats meat as he roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He also warms himself and says, ‘Aha! I am warm, I have seen the fire.’ But the rest of it he makes into a

¹ The Holy Bible : English standard version. 2001. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

god, his graven image. He falls down before it and worships; he also prays to it and says, 'Deliver me, for thou art my god.'"

What could be more silly than taking a piece of wood and with half of it cooking a meal and with the other half making a god on which you rely for protection? How could a piece of wood subject to a fire protect you from anything?

Now as silly as this picture is, it is an apt description of many in the church today! How many of you have ever been in a discussion about the Bible and heard it said, "My god wouldn't do that!"? Consider with me the statement. Are these not the words of one who is fashioning a god to fit what they want in a god? To say, "My God wouldn't do that" is to impose upon Scripture what you believe about God! And is there really any difference between that and fashioning a god out of wood? Not really! One is fashioned with our hands. The other is fashioned with our minds!

Psalm 50:21b, "...you thought that I was just like you..."

A. W. Tozer put it this way:

"Let us beware lest we in our pride accept the erroneous notion that idolatry consists only in kneeling before visible objects of adoration, and that civilized peoples are therefore free from it. The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. It begins in the mind and may be present where no overt act of worship has taken place."²

One of the most important things we could ever do as Christians is to approach God's word with integrity and allow God's word to shape our understanding of God, rather than allowing our view of God to shape our understanding of Scripture! We must speak where God has spoken and remain silent where He is silent. As we continue discussing the wrath of God, I therefore encourage us all to approach this text as "noble-minded believers" (Acts 17:11) allowing what it tells us about God to shape our understanding of what God is!

Previously we looked at the nature of God's wrath where we saw that it is unique. It is the wrath of a Being completely unlike us. We've never seen this wrath demonstrated by a man. By definition the word used for "wrath" here carries the idea of "settled indignation" and is the opposite of *blowing up*. It carries with it a subjective element wherein we saw that God's wrath is not just punishment. It is a holy revulsion of God's being against the object of God's wrath.

Thus to reference "the wrath of God" is not only to say something about what God does, but also about what HE IS in doing it! When used of God it carries with it a twofold idea: Judicial Punishment & Displeasure/Anger.

Essential to the Gospel

Secondly we saw that God's wrath is an essential part of the gospel. If we deny that by ourselves we stand condemned before God and so are under His wrath, we will gaze upon Christ on the cross and feel pity, but no more. The gospel is most precious to those who know both the conviction of sin and the

² A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, pages 11-12

wages their sin deserve!

Able to Be Averted

Thirdly, the wrath of God is able to be averted. That is why Jesus Christ came into the world. He was born that He might die in the place of the sinner “unto the praise of the glory of God’s grace” (Ephesians 1:6)!

God’s Wrath Expressed

We are going to continue with Paul’s *Introduction* into this subject learning three more elements about the wrath of God in its expression.

Roman 1:18, “for the wrath of God is revealed.”

As we saw in connection to Romans 1:17, the word for “revealed” in the Bible can mean “to be seen or manifested.”³ This is the way we typically use the term. However, its primary use in the Bible carries the more active sense of “being worked-out in, upon, or through.” For example we see it in Romans 1.

Romans 1:17, “For in it [the gospel] *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous *man* shall live by faith.’”

We saw in connection with this verse that because mankind stands before God on a legal basis (like we do with a bank when we take out a loan for our house). Mankind has not fulfilled the obligations that are incumbent upon them (in this case of Genesis 2:15-17, Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil). Each and every individual stands before God condemned!

If you or I don’t pay our mortgage our relationship with the bank will be dissolved and we’ll lose our house. So it was with our first parents. They violated the terms of the relationship and so lost their relationship with God. Yet the good news is that God has paid the debt of death on behalf of those who rely upon Christ as the payment for their sin.

That is what is being spoken about in this verse. The right-standing of God is revealed/given to each and everyone who believes or relies upon Christ as their sacrifice! We see it in Romans 8.

Romans 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed [granted] to us.”

The hope of everyone here is that someday God is going to transform us such that we will be able to stand in His presence in glory. That is what Paul is talking about when it references the “revelation of Christ’s glory.” The believer’s hope isn’t that we would see God’s glory, but that we would participate in it.⁴ That is the idea behind “revealed” in Scripture. It is an active imparting of something; here, God’s wrath. And so as explanation as to why each and everyone needs the right-standing of God given to

³ Compare Luke 12:2 and Philippians 3:15

⁴ Compare also Philippians 3:21; Colossians 3:3-4!

them in Christ, Paul says that it is because God's actively wrath rests upon man!

Now at first this is shocking. Yet as we consider the whole of Scripture, we ought not to be surprised. The doctrine of the wrath of God is found throughout Scripture. For example, in the garden in Genesis 3,

- When Adam and Eve trusted the serpent's word above God's, God's wrath was revealed!
- And they (and all their offspring) immediately received the sentence of death. Even the earth itself received a curse!

In the time of Noah, Genesis 6-7,

- On account of the perverse and immoral people in Noah's day, God's wrath was revealed!
- And the human race except for 8 souls was drowned by the flood.

In the time of Abraham, Genesis 19:24,

- On account of the degenerate people in Sodom and Gomorrah, God's wrath was revealed!
- And the inhabitants of both cities died in the burning heat of fire and brimstone!

In the time of Moses, Exodus 14,

- When the Pharaoh hardened his heart and pursued the people of God to kill them, God's wrath was revealed!
- And all of Pharaoh's army was destroyed by drowning.

In the Present Age, Matthew 27:50,

- When Jesus hung on the cross and took upon Himself the sin of His people, the full Divine force of God's wrath was revealed!
- And He who should have never died, bore our sin and died with the agonizing words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46).

In the Age to Come, Revelation 16:19, 21,

- God's wrath will be revealed against "Babylon the great."
- The result will be that "huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each" will come "down from heaven upon men."

From these examples we see that the wrath of God is active; it is dynamically and effectively operative. It is NOT simply "seen to be against sin." Rather, it is actively being worked out against people on account of their sin! Now as bad as this may sound, it is worse than you and I might think. For notice:

Romans 1:18, "for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven."

In the Bible, heaven is viewed as the place of God. For example, it is the place...

- Toward which men are to direct their prayers, 2 Chronicles 30:27; 32:20.
- In which God hears prayers, 1 Kings 8:30, 32; Nehemiah 9:27.
- From which God speaks to man, Exodus 20:22; Deuteronomy 4:36.
- From which God sends man help, Psalm 57:3.
- Of God's throne, Isaiah 66:1; Matthew 5:34; 23:22.

Accordingly, Paul's statement that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven" is a reverent way of referring to God Himself, and so tells of the *agent* when it comes to the wrath of God: IT IS GOD HIMSELF! Thus, it is not that we discover God's wrath when we suffer the consequences of our sin; it is that God's wrath discovers us because God Himself reveals it/works it out!

From this we see that God's wrath is NOT...

- Passive.
- Simply seen to be against sin.

Rather, God's wrath is an active, dynamic, and present reality. Thus, the passage which says that "it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31) is NOT merely referring to a future time of judgment. Indeed, it has relevance today!

The Objects of God's Wrath

This leads us to the question: Who or What receives God's revealed wrath?

Romans 1:18, "for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

Note that God's wrath is not an uncontrolled, irrational fury which someday will indiscriminately destroy one and all. It is the wrath of a holy God called forth by and directed against the "ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." From this we conclude that the object of God's wrath is man! We say, "Hate the sin but love the sinner" primarily because we do not know who is saved and who is not. Yet when it comes to God, there is no guess-work or mystery. He knows those who are His. Accordingly and most shockingly, when the day comes that God's wrath is expressed in its fullness, the objects of God's wrath will be individual men and women.

Romans 5:9, "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him."

If those in Christ are saved from God's wrath, the implication is that there are those who are not! Accordingly we understand that there will be a day when God's wrath will rest upon man.

John 3:36, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

That is what the Day of Judgment is all about; the time when God will express His wrath upon man. Until

then, let there be no mistake, God's wrath is being stored up.

Romans 2:5-6, "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds."

Matthew 3:7b, Christ indicted the Jews of His day, "...'You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?'"

Revelation 6:16-17, "And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?'"

The Cause of God's Wrath

Truly, when we speak of the Wrath of God we are speaking of that terrifying, horrifying reality that a holy God is angry with individuals! So the object of God's wrath is man! Yet why is that? Why is God angry with the sinner? Notice the cause of God's wrath.

Romans 1:18, "for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

The reason for God's wrath is multifaceted. First off notice that God's wrath rests upon individual men and women because of their "ungodliness and unrighteousness." Ungodliness (ἀσεβειαν) refers to lack of reverence for, devotion to, and worship of the true God; a failure that inevitably leads to some form of false worship. In essence, ungodliness is idolatry.

God created man that we might honor and glorify Him. As the Creator, He has the right to receive this worship. This is the Doctrine of Creator Rights.⁵ We have been created to fellowship with God unto the praise of His glory! When mankind turned their back on God and said, "*Fellowship with you? Worship you? No way! We're going to do what we want!*" They violated their legal relationship with God and so stood condemned! They withheld their house payment and so were kicked out of the house!

Now this rebellion on the part of man has led to all manner of rebellion in the lives of men. That is the idea behind unrighteousness. Unrighteousness (ἀδικίαν) this encompasses the idea of ungodliness but focuses on its results. Sin first attacks God's majesty and then His law!⁶ Thus, "unrighteousness" refers to any and all irreverence for God's commands. In essence, unrighteousness is immorality.

And so on account of man's refusal to worship God, a sin which has led to all kinds of unrighteous living, God's wrath will be revealed. Yet this still is not strong enough, for notice what Paul wrote:

Romans 1:18, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against ALL ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

⁵ Compare Revelation 4:11

⁶ Both of these words are inter-related. In fact, one flows from the other. Because man's relation to God is wrong, their relation with their fellow man is wrong! Accordingly men treat other men the way they do because they treat God the way they do.

This an important word! It not just those actions that are done with poor motives which receive God's wrath. Indeed, God's wrath is against ANY and ALL ungodliness and unrighteousness! God does not overlook any evil for any reason! Thus, no amount of goodwill, giving to the poor, helpfulness to others, or even service to God can exclude a person from the "ALL" mentioned here by Paul. The wages of any sin is death (Romans 3:23; Matthew 7:22-23).

Now practically speaking, how does this work?

Romans 1:18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, **who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.**"⁷

The word for *suppress* means to hold down, or back. It comes from two Greek words which intensifies the idea. And thus it means to intensely have or to hold.⁸ The idea behind this word is that of pushing or holding something down, and that with intensity! It is the attempt to hide, bury, or obliterate God's truth from one's life.

Note also that this word is in the present tense, carrying the idea that this "suppression" is an ongoing process. It is never complete but is constantly worked at in the lives of man. What specifically are they seeking to "suppress"?

They are seeking to suppress the "truth;" this is not referring to the truth God has revealed in Christ in His word. Rather, this is "the truth" about God that is open to all people; that which is known by General Revelation.

Romans 1:19, "...That which is known about God is evident within them; for God make it evident to them."

Thus all people, regardless of their relative opportunity to know God's Word and hear the gospel, have an internal, God-given evidence of His existence and nature. Those who are the recipients of God's wrath resist and assault this evidence. How do they do this?

They suppress the truth in unrighteousness. This references the means of their opposition; they suppress the truth through unrighteous actions! We get a glimpse at these actions in Romans 1:24-32.

See, it is impossible to simply ignore the truth of God and what He expects. Accordingly the non-Christian must resort to all kinds of immoral conduct to squelch, smother, hide, and/or reject God. That is why an appropriate description of the apostate is on who is "...seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron" (1 Timothy 4:2).

So the Cause of God's wrath is twofold:

- First mankind stands before God and refuses to give Him the honor and glory that is His due. Instead, they run headlong into sin and rebellion.
- The consequence of this is an attempt on the part of man to hold back the truth about God

⁷ The Holy Bible : English standard version. 2001. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

⁸ Compare 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7; Romans 7:6; and Luke 4:42

through unrighteous living! The more immoral and ungodly a person becomes the more he snubs God!

Now don't miss the implication here. We so often hold the view that sin is doing what is wrong and on one level this is appropriate, for God's word does say, "sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). Yet, this is only half of it! Sin not only involves doing what is wrong, but according to our text, it is also a...

- Denial of God.
- Pushing down of what God would have us to do.
- Suppression of what is right!

And this is the essence of sin. A rejection of God resulting in immoral conduct! We see it in the fall. Genesis 3:1-7 contains a description of the fall of man. In Genesis 3:1-5 we read of the context in which Satan approaches the woman, tempts her, and so encourages her to eat. In Genesis 3:6a, we read of their casting off of God's authority in their life whereby they did that which was pleasing in their eyes. In verse 6b we read of the immoral conduct which resulted on account of the rejection.

From this we discover that the fall took place when man first rejected God and so ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The fall of mankind involved far more than simply Adam eating a forbidden fruit. It was an all-out rejection of God and His authority! Paul summarizes this for us when he writes 1 Timothy.

1 Timothy 2:14, "And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression."

Their lawless living resulted in their lawless heart. And so, you don't sin without first rejecting God. And it is this rejection which serves as the CAUSE for God's wrath!

Such is the doctrine of the Wrath of God.

- God's wrath is unique and is an essential part of the Gospel for it is able to be averted, Romans 1:18a.
- God's wrath is an active, dynamic, present reality which at this moment is being worked out in and against sin, Romans 1:18b.
- God's wrath is directed against ALL sin and EVERY sinner, Romans 1:18c.
- God's wrath is revealed on account of man's attempt to hold back the truth about God and our obligation so serve the Lord, Romans 1:18d!

Now that brings us to ourselves and the question: What implication does this text hold for me? Are you a recipient of the wrath of God? Do you on a day to day basis, as a characteristic of your life, reject the truth of God and the demands that He has on your life? Is your life committed to...

- The exaltation of God?
- The glory and adoration of God?
- Pleasing God in all respects?

Or are you living for yourself? Are you living for...

- Your best?
- Your glory?
- Your honor?
- Your wants?

I warn you the relative ease of your life and the lack of difficulty which enables you to live as you have are NOT because...

- There is no God.
- Or if there is a God, He respects your lifestyle and loves you too much to intervene.

Rather...

- God who is rich in grace is withholding His wrath and so storing it up that you might have time to turn from your sin unto Christ.

Romans 2:3-5, "And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

If you persist in your rebellion against God, I bear you witness that the wrath of God that has been accumulating against you like a grand reservoir will one day be released. As you continue in your stupor wherein you cry...

- "Peace, safety."
- "God is love. There is no worry."
- "There is no danger."

...the wrath of God, like a wound-up spring, will be released and directed solely at you in fierce heat and destruction. Your life will be like a pebble caught in the torrent of a mighty flood, and you will be cast into the lake of fire where there "the worm does not die, and the fire is never quenched."

Now based on this text and the grace of God which this very moment is withholding his wrath that you might turn from your sin unto Christ, I appeal to you flee the wrath to come! Turn from your sin and self-dependence! Go to Christ, who died on account of our sins, and ask for His forgiveness. He will forgive you!

For those of us who have been freed from the wrath of God, how should we respond to this text?

In view of the wrath that has been averted in our lives, we should be EXUBERANT Christians.

Romans 5:1-2, "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord

Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.”

Peace with God is inseparably linked with exulting in God! To be freed from the wrath of God is to be placed in the family of God wherein God is our Father and we are His children. Thus as the children of God, we have an inheritance with the Father in which He will transform our humble estate into conformity with His likeness! Now when the Christian recognizes this truth that which naturally follows is a life of “exulting” which denotes jubilation and rejoicing. Thus, the Christian need NOT fear the future or allow the temporal things of this life to overcome him. If they will but hope in Christ they will be filled with a joy that is inexpressible!

If your life is not characterized by joy, it is probably because...

- Your eyes are not on eternity, but the present.
- Your eyes are not on the kingdom of God, but on the kingdoms of the earth.

In view of the wrath that is able to be averted, we should be PERSUASIVE Christians. In reference to the wrath of God, Paul wrote this:

2 Corinthians 5:11, “Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men [that is we convince, engage, or endeavor to win man]...”

For Paul, the Day of Judgment evoked in him a healthy fear and reverence of God. And on account of his knowledge of Jesus Christ, this fear compelled him to be faithful with regard to his witness. Likewise, God’s wrath should also compel us to be faithful with regard to our witness! May our reverence for the Lord and respect for the wrath that is soon to come upon all mankind impel us to share the glorious message of Christ.

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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