

The Wrath & Mercy of God

Text: Romans 1:16-20

Introduction:

1. Illustration (D.L. Moody); I was in the north of England in 1881, when a fearful storm swept over that part of the country (Oct 14, 1881). A friend of mine, who was a minister at Eyemouth, had a great many of the fishermen of the place in his congregation. It had been very stormy weather, and the fishermen had been detained in the harbor for a week. One day, however, the sun shone out in a clear blue sky; it seemed as if the storm had passed away, and the boats started out for the fishing ground. Forty-one boats left the harbor that day. Before they started, the harbor-master hoisted the storm signal, and warned them of the coming tempest. He begged of them not to go; but they disregarded his warning, and away they went. They saw no sign of the coming storm. In a few hours, however, it swept down on that coast, and very few of those fishermen returned. There were five or six men in each boat, and nearly all were lost in that dreadful gale. In total, 189 men perished, 129 were from Eyemouth itself. In the church of which my friend was pastor, I believe there were three male members left. Those men were ushered into eternity because they did not give heed to the warning. I lift up the storm signal now, and warn you to escape from the coming judgment! (Moody's Anecdotes, Page 115-116.)
2. This Section: 1:18-3:20 – The Universal Reign of Sin/Man's Condemnation. "Sin, wrath and judgment occupy center stage. These verses prepare the way for the Gospel of God's righteousness." (Moo) Paul announces the fact of God's wrath upon sinful men and the reasons for that wrath.

I. God's Wrath Declared (Vs. 18a)

A. Divine Wrath – "the wrath of God"

1. Vs. 18 = like the heading for the whole section (1:18-3:20).
2. Note the phrases "of God" & "from heaven". God's Holy fury is distinct from anything known by sinful man. It is just, holy wrath.
3. 'wrath' = word used most frequently to describe the Divine anger.
 - a. Refers to "the deep-seated anger of God against sin. An anger that arises from His holiness and righteousness." (Linguistic Key) It is not the quick boiling up of anger (thumos) but an anger (orge) that builds until it finally bursts out in vengeance upon the object of its indignation (S. 2:5).
 - b. It is "The temper of God towards sin, not rage, but the wrath of reason and law." (RWP)
 - c. Same word is translated 'vengeance' in Rom. 3:5 & 'indignation' in Rev. 14:10. It is "*the wrath of Almighty God.*" (Rev. 19:15).

B. Present Wrath – "is revealed"

1. "is revealed" = present tense. God's wrath is already upon sinful, unrepentant men.

2. John 3:36 “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but **the wrath of God abideth on him.**”
3. Col. 3:6 “For which things' sake the wrath of God **cometh** on the children of disobedience.”
4. Psalm 7:11 “God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked **every day.**”

II. God’s Wrath Directed (Vs. 18b)

Paul specifies the objects of God’s wrath. God’s wrath is directed against two things:

A. The Sinfulness of Man (Vs. 18b)

1. Impiety – ‘ungodliness’

- a. ‘all’ = a comprehensive word that covers all sin.
- b. ‘ungodliness’ = irreverence towards God, disrespect. “It means disregard of God and his commands and neglect of his worship.” (Webster)
- c. Illustration: Ungodliness is the breaking of the first table of the 10 commandments which all have to do with our relationship to God (See Ex. 30:1-17).

1st Commandment: “Thou shalt have no other gods **before** me.” (Vs. 3)

- This refers to the worship of false gods (e.g. idols, pagan gods and goddesses, worship of sun, moon or other parts of nature).
- This also refers to the worship of anything in the place of God. Essentially whatever comes first in your life, that is your god (e.g. money, career, sports, pleasures, cars, hobbies).

2nd Commandment: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image...” (Vs. 4-6)

- A graven image is a god of one’s own making. The word ‘graven’ means ‘carved’, hence referring to the process of making an idol.
- God’s commandments go beyond outward actions and probe into the depths of the heart. It is possible to craft a false god in your imagination, even if you do not bow down to a physical idol. This is very common in our country where people say things like, “I don’t believe a loving God would send someone to hell for their sins” or “I believe God is ok with same sex marriage and same sex attraction.” You are creating a false god of your own imagination. We need to remember that idolatry begins in the mind.
- Psalm 50:21 “These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou **thoughtest** that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.”

3rd commandment: “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.” (Vs. 7)

- The word ‘vain’ means ‘empty’, ‘purposeless’. Taking God’s Name is using God’s Name as a swear word but it is more than that. It covers using God’s name flippantly and carelessly without a spirit of reverence or without any real purpose. It is when we rob God’s Name of its value.
- Think about it! The Name of God is the most sacred Name in the universe and you use it lightly, or worse still, in place of a filthy sware word.

4th commandment: “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.” (Vs. 8-11)

- For the Jewish people this was Saturday. In the N.T., we find believers worshipping on a Sunday, the day of Christ’s resurrection.
- The principle is of giving God a full day in the week. The generation we live in typically gives 5 days to the boss and then the weekend for themselves, or worse, 7 days a week for themselves!

2. Impurity – ‘unrighteousness’

- a. Unrighteousness is the consequence of ungodliness. It is the lack of right conduct toward men, injustice and follows as a natural consequence from irreverence toward God. “The basis of ethical conduct rests on the nature of God and our attitude toward him, otherwise the law of the jungle.” (RWP)
- b. A low view of God fruits in low morality. Irreverent attitudes and actions towards God lead to irreverent attitudes and actions towards men.
- c. Illustration: Unrighteousness is the breaking of the second table of the 10 commandments which have to do with our relationship to our fellow man.

5th commandment: “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”

- We are seeing a shocking disrespect towards parents and parental authority in our day.
- Have you always honored your parents?

6th commandment: “Thou shalt not kill” (Vs. 13)

- God’s commandments penetrate beyond our outward actions into our inner man. You may not have ever murdered someone with your hands but have you murdered them in your heart?
- 1 John 3:15 “Whosoever **hateth his brother is a murderer:** and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.”

7th commandment: “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” (Vs. 14)

- Adultery is breaking your marriage vows. This command can also be broken in the heart. Jesus said, “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her **hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.**” (Matt. 5:28)
- This commandment covers all other deviations from God’s gift of sex and marriage (e.g. fornication, sodomy, pornography, bestiality, incest).

8th commandment: “Thou shalt not steal” (Vs. 15)

- While you may not be a bank robber, at some time in your life you have broken this law.
- Have you ever stolen something small? What about misuse of the boss’s time? What about borrowing something and eventually not returning it because the original owner forgets about it?

9th commandment: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.” (Vs. 16)

- Specifically, this refers to giving false evidence against someone (i.e. in court).
- It includes spreading slander and false reports about someone’s character and all lying in general.

10th commandment: “**Thou shalt not covet** thy neighbour's house, thou **shalt not covet** thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that *is* thy neighbour's.”

- To crave and desire something that belongs to someone else.
- Eph. 5:5 “For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor **covetous man**, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.”
 - d. The message of the Bible is clear, **all have sinned!** (Ecc. 7:20; Rom. 3:10, 23; 5:12; 1 John 3:4).

B. The Skepticism of Man (Vs. 18c)

1. “hold the truth in unrighteousness” = ‘hold’ = compound word made up of ‘down’ & ‘hold’; refers to someone who “holds down” or suppresses the truth. It is willful ignorance (2. Peter 3:5)
2. The same word is used in Heb. 10:23 “Let us **hold fast** the profession of our faith...”
3. “the truth” = truth concerning God’s Divine Person revealed through creation and conscience
4. ‘unrighteousness’ = the reason behind why they suppress the truth. To acknowledge the Creator God has implications for the way we live (See Psalm 14:1-3).

III. God's Wrath Defended (Vs. 19-20)

These verses explain more specifically the reasons for God's wrath stated in Vs. 18. The heathen are justly under the judgment of God as they have rejected the light God has given them through **conscience** and **creation**:

A. The Light of Conscience (19)

1. 'because' = gives reason for God's wrath (Vs. 18).
2. "manifest" = made clear.
3. "in them" = In their hearts and consciences (inner witness) S. 2:14-15 on the conscience.
4. "shewed it unto them" = The heathen have the outer witness of creation. God has presented it before their eyes.

B. The light of Creation (20)

1. "invisible things...clearly seen" = God has Revealed His invisible character and attributes in the physical universe He has created.
2. Note the words in these verses that demonstrate just how clearly God has revealed Himself in creation: '**known**', '**manifest**', '**shewed**', "**clearly seen**" & '**understood**'.
3. "his eternal power and Godhead" = two specific things God has revealed about Himself.
 - a. Power – Even without the benefit of modern, scientific discovery, all one needs to do is look around at the Created Universe to conclude that the Almighty God must be All Powerful.
 - b. 'Godhead' = His Divine Nature. E.g. God of wisdom, God of order (laws speak of a lawgiver), God of beauty.
 - c. Psalm 19:1-4 *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world..."*
 - d. Illustration: **The Human Brain**¹

The information in the brain equals that contained in 20 million separate books (George Cahill, Science Digest, Vol. 89, issue 3, 1981, p. 105). The brain has about 200 billion nerve cells with hundreds of trillions of connections called synapses. Each synapse functions like a microprocessor "with both memory-storage and information-processing elements" (Cornelius Hunter, "More Switches Than the Internet," *Darwin's God*, Nov. 17, 2010.). One synapse may contain 1,000 switches. In the cerebral cortex alone there are 125 trillion synapses, which is about how many stars would fill 1,500 Milky Way galaxies. The brain receives signals from 137 million light receptors in the eyes, 100,000 hearing receptors in the ears, 3,000 taste buds, 30,000 heat sensors on the skin, 250,000 cold sensors, and 500,000 touch sensors (Bert Thompson, *The Revelation of God and Nature*). The hearing receptors

¹ D. Cloud, *Seeing the Non-Existent; Evolutions Myths and Hoaxes*, pp. 376-377

alone send up to 25,000 auditory signals per second to the brain, which interprets them as voices, thunder, music, or a million other sounds (Jackson, *The Human Body*).

e. Illustration: **The Human Eye**²

The eye's retina is less than one square inch in surface area but it contains 137 million light-sensitive receptor cells. 130 million of these are rod cells (which see in black and white) while 7 million are cone cells (which allow colour vision). Each photoreceptor cell is vastly more complex than the most sophisticated man-made computer (Alan Gillen, *Body by Design*, p. 98). And each complex photoreceptor cell replaces itself every seven days. Intelligent processing occurs in the retina before the information is transmitted to the brain. It has been estimated that 10 billion calculations occur every second in the retina before the image even gets to the brain (Gillen). The eyes are self-cleaning and self-maintaining. They produce three different types of tears, each with its own complex chemical makeup. Basal tears are the normal lubricating tears that keep the eye clear of dust. The composition of these tears include lysozyme which fights against bacterial infection as part of the body's mind-bogglingly complex immune system. Reflex tears are produced to flush the eye of irritants, such as onion or pepper vapours. Emotional tears are produced as a result of emotional stress and contain a natural painkiller and calming hormones."

4. "without excuse" = without legal defence (no answer).

IV. God's Wrath Escaped (Vs. 16-17)

A. God offers you Salvation! (Vs. 16)

1. This is made possible through the Gospel of Christ (Vs. 16a). The Gospel is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). See also Rom. 5:8; 6:23
2. This is made possible through the power of God (Vs. 16b)
 - a. **Supernatural Power!** God is the source of this power. Same word used to describe Christ's resurrection (Eph. 1:19-20). Our English word 'dynamite' comes from this Greek Word.
 - b. **Saving Power!**
 - i. "unto salvation" = The saving power of God is embodied in the Gospel message. 'salvation' means deliverance or rescue.
 - ii. "to everyone" = universal invitation to all men.
 - iii. "that believeth = salvation received through faith (Eph. 2:8-9). The word 'believeth' mean "trusting in, relying on, having faith in."

B. God offers you Righteousness (Vs. 17)

1. The Source of this Righteousness (Vs. 17a)
 - a. "the righteousness of God" = Key phrase almost exclusively found in Romans referring to the righteousness connected with salvation and the Gospel. Refers to the righteousness of God

² Ibid, pp. 372-374

that is imputed (credited) to the sinner by faith. “The righteous standing which God gives.” (See Rom. 3:19-28; 10:9-10; Phil. 3:8-9).

- b. Isaiah 61:10 *“I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; **for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.**”*
 - c. Question: Are you clothed in your own righteousness or in God’s righteousness? Isaiah 64:6 *“...all **our** righteousnesses are as **filthy rags...**”*
2. The Receiving of this Righteousness (Vs. 17b)
- a. “from faith to faith...the just shall live by faith” = salvation is received by faith.
 - b. Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5.

Conclusion:

1. Have you repented of your sin and received God’s gift of salvation?
2. Is there anyone here who would say “I want to know more. Please pray for me.”