

Wrath Revealed

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[0 : 00] You guys open your Bibles to Romans chapter 1. We're going to look this morning just at three verses that we will read. We will really focus on only one verse, but we're going to read three verses here, verses 18 and 19 and 20.

And so as you turn there in your Bibles, or as you find it there on your phone, I want you guys to stand and read God's Word together with me. The Apostle Paul says in 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.

For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made.

So they are without excuse. Thank You for this Word, Father. Open our eyes to be changed by it and challenged by it, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. With verse 18 in chapter 1 of Romans, we're coming to the first major section of the book of Romans. It runs from chapter 1, verse 18, all the way down through chapter 3, verse 20.

[1 : 22] That's the first major section in the book of Romans. So far, we've looked at the first 17 verses. The first 15 verses of this book, as we saw, are really introductory material. Paul did not plant the church in Rome.

He did not start the church in Rome. And so he writes the first 15 verses of this letter, more or less to introduce himself and let him know about his plans to come and visit them. He wants to come to Rome and use Rome as a staging point to launch to further places like Spain so that he might preach the Gospel there.

And then verses 16 and 17 tell us about Paul's boldness in preaching the Gospel. What underlies his desire to preach the Gospel both to the Roman Christians and also to those in regions, as he says in chapter 15, where Christ has not yet been named?

What underlies that? What empowers that? What motivates him? And he says in verses 16 and 17 that it is the fact that the Gospel itself is the power of God for salvation.

And verses 16 and 17 we saw last week are really sort of the thesis for the whole book of Romans. Romans, they introduce us to the theme of the whole book and they tell us what Paul is aiming to demonstrate in the book of Romans.

[2 : 39] He's aiming to demonstrate and show that the Gospel is indeed God's power to save and it is God's power to save because in the Gospel, the righteousness of God is made known to us.

And we said last week that the righteousness of God made known to us in the Gospel is not merely His moral perfection. That's not what Paul means by the righteousness of God there. But the righteousness of God made known in the Gospel is the righteousness that God gives to us as a free gift through faith in Jesus.

So, in the Gospel, God reveals His righteousness which He gives to us when we believe in Jesus. And I said to you last week that the reason that we need that righteousness, the reason that we need God to count another one's righteousness to be our righteousness is because we're not righteous.

We're not holy. We are not godly people on our own. And because of that, God's wrath hangs over us. And that's what verse 18 is really about.

I want you to take a look just at this one verse where we're going to focus this morning. He says, The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

[4 : 00] I just want us to attempt to answer three questions this morning about this verse. And they are, number one, what exactly is meant by the wrath of God? What is the wrath of God?

Let's not take anything for granted. Let's not assume that we're all on the same page when it comes to defining these very basic and simple terms. What is the wrath of God? And then secondly, what is the unrighteousness to which He refers in this verse?

Two times He mentions it. God's wrath is coming against unrighteousness. The unrighteousness by which we suppress the truth. So what is meant by unrighteousness?

And then number three, what does it mean for God's wrath to be revealed upon those who are unrighteous? So what is the wrath of God? What is unrighteousness?

And then what does it mean for the wrath of God to be revealed? Funny thing about the word wrath, though, I think, is that it's one of those words that we don't really blink an eye when we read it.

[5 : 00] We see it in print, particularly in the Bible. Many times we see the word wrath. But it's not a word that we actually use in everyday language, is it? I mean, I can't remember outside of preaching or teaching a Bible study.

I can't remember the last time that I just threw out the word wrath in the middle of a conversation. But it's one that we're okay with in print. It's kind of like the word therefore. How many of you ever say therefore when you talk to people? I never say therefore.

But if I'm writing something, there's a pretty good chance if I'm trying to communicate logically the flow of thought, there's a pretty good chance that I might actually use the word therefore a few times if I'm writing.

But I'm never going to say something like, he ran out of the house, therefore he must be angry. Why would I say that? I'd say, well, the guy ran out of the house, so he's got to be mad about something, you know? Nobody ever says the word therefore.

It'd be like, if you called my house and one of my kids answered the phone, he said, hey, can I talk to your dad? And he said, one moment, please. And then he came back to the phone and he said, my dad is not available.

[5 : 59] May I take a message? You would think, has he been trained like a trained monkey on how to answer the phone? Does he know exactly what to do? Is his house functioning like it's a business or something? Because nobody talks like that.

He'd say, hold on a second, let me check. Then he'd come back. Oh, my dad's busy right now. He can't get on the phone. Do you want me to tell him something? He'd say something like that. Because there are just things that we put in print. There are ways that we speak when we're speaking formally that we just don't say all the time.

And I think the wrath of God is just one of those words that because we don't use it in our normal everyday language, it's very easy for us not to have thought about what the word really communicates, particularly as we come to this phrase, the wrath of God.

What exactly is the wrath of God? Let me tell you two things that it's not. OK, the wrath of God, for starters, is not God's sudden outburst of anger.

It's not a sudden, uncontrolled, emotional response of God to something that he doesn't like. That's not at all what his wrath is. In fact, that's how we might think of the word wrath.

[7 : 07] We sometimes, when we use formal language or the language of writing in our everyday speech, sometimes we think it just intensifies the regular words. So we use the word mad or angry all the time.

And well, wrath must just be an intensification of what it means to be angry. And for us, most of the time, we get angry really quickly. When somebody cuts us off in traffic, suddenly we get mad.

When our kids give us a look or say something to us that they ought not to do that, then suddenly we get mad, we get angry. And so we think of wrath as just sort of an intensification of that process of instantaneously having an emotional reaction to something.

But that's not precisely what God's wrath is. It's not just a sudden response to things that he does not like or that upset him.

That's not what God's wrath is. But then on the other end of the spectrum, I have heard some people say that God's wrath is not in any way an emotional response of God to sin.

[8 : 06] That's not what his wrath is, I've heard people say. That instead, what God's wrath really is, is God just sort of letting sin take its course. That's what it is.

So that God, in expressing his wrath, they would say, is not actually personally doing anything to punish someone for sin. What God is simply doing is allowing it to take its course so that wrath is not an emotion in God.

Wrath is not God's personal response to anything. And both of those views that I think are on the far ends of the spectrum miss the mark. Because God's wrath is, in fact, his personal response to sin.

When Romans 6.23 says that the wages of sin is death, we might begin to think, oh, well, that just means that, well, sin brings death and God just sort of lets it happen.

But if you look down at the end of Romans chapter 1, this great chapter that is all about sin, we see quite a different picture painted of the relationship between sin and its consequences.

[9 : 09] Take a look down to verse 32, where Paul says, after listing all of these sins toward the end of this chapter, he says, though they, that is who do all these sins he's just mentioned, though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die.

Now, pause right there. He says it is God's decree that those who practice sinful things deserve to die. So when he says the wages of sin is death, that's not an impersonal sort of mechanistic thing that God has put in place that just sort of happens, and God's not personally involved in imposing the penalty of death upon sinners.

Here it is God's command, it is God's decree that those who sin deserve to die. And who do you think enforces that decree? Who do you think determines the moment when we all die?

It's God himself, so that the wrath of God, God's response to human sin, is very much a personal response that he himself engages in.

And to that end, it is, in a very real way, an emotional response that God has to sin. It's not abstract. It's not happening apart from God's personal involvement.

[10 : 25] God is involved in it. But that very language of God decreeing that death should take place also shows us that this is not God flying off the handle.

This is not a sudden eruption of anger that comes from God. That's not what the wrath of God is. The wrath of God is his fixed, stable, eternal response to human sin and evil.

That's what the wrath of God is. It's not sudden and it's not him hands off letting things happen. It is his fixed, stable, eternal response to evil and sin.

And if we use the language of Paul, unrighteousness in the world. That's exactly what it is. I say eternal because it will last forever. This is not a temporary response.

The book of Revelation paints a vivid picture for us that there is a place where the devil, the beast and all those who follow him, that is, all those who do not trust in Christ, will suffer forever.

[11 : 33] This is an eternal, everlasting response of God to sin and evil and unrighteousness. And it is a fixed, stable, steady response that he always, always has.

It's his. It's personal. He's angry about it. He's emotional about it. But he's not flying off the handle. He has decreed that this is how I will respond to sin.

That's what Paul means when he says that the wrath of God is being revealed. But he says that it's being revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

Now, I take those two terms to be virtually synonymous. Ungodliness and unrighteousness really mean essentially the same thing. And Paul's just sort of stressing his point here. And I think that's why he adds unrighteousness again in this verse.

He wants to stress this whole idea of the sinfulness of sin. It is indeed unrighteous. But I want us to pause again and ask, what exactly do we mean by unrighteous?

[12 : 35] Because we could give the easy answer, couldn't we? We could say, well, an unrighteous person is somebody who doesn't do what's right. That's the easy answer, right? But then, how do you know what's right?

Well, you have the law of God. You have the law of Moses. And that's true to a certain extent. But I want us to dig beneath that because Paul, in this chapter, digs beneath that very simple answer.

And he helps us to see it with a more clear focus exactly what he has in mind when he talks about unrighteousness or ungodliness. He wants us to know specifically what that is.

So just glance down. Let's look at a few verses in this chapter that help us to see what it is. Verse 21, for instance, says that, Although they, they are the unrighteous, although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking.

So unrighteousness is, at least partially at its core, a refusal to honor God and a refusal to give thanks to God. Now move down two more verses.

[13 : 40] Verse 23. He says that they also exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images. So now, the unrighteousness is a refusal to honor God and give thanks to Him, and an exchanging, a trading in of His glory for something of lesser value.

Move down once again. Verse 25. It says that they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator.

So now we have to add another element. Now, it is a giving, not only is it a giving of glory to something other than God, but it's an actual offering up of worship to something or someone other than God Himself.

So we might, if we wanted to sort of summarize what unrighteousness is in the mind of the Apostle Paul, we might say this, that unrighteousness is the giving of glory, honor, and thanks, and worship to anything or anyone other than God Himself.

It is the giving of what rightfully belongs to God to something or someone else. That's what unrighteousness is. That is what sin is.

[14 : 56] So that when we come to Romans 3, verse 23, which we memorize a lot of times, and if we want to present the Gospel to somebody, it's one of the verses we usually put in there in the list of verses. You need to memorize Romans 3, verse 23.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And we treat those as two separate things. Well, we've sinned and, in addition to sinning, we've fallen short of God's glory.

But if you read Romans 3, verse 23, in the light of the verses we've seen in chapter 1, in reality, to sin is to fall short of God's glory. And that's what Paul is telling us. We have sinned.

We have, in effect, fallen short of giving God the glory that He deserves. And that is the essence and definition of unrighteousness. To refuse to give to God what rightfully belongs to Him.

All honor, thanks, glory, praise, and worship. Which means that if we then turn the question around and we say, what is righteousness?

[15 : 59] Righteousness is the giving to God of honor, thanks, glory, and praise, and worship. Things that rightly belong to Him.

And, in fact, we could take that a step further and we could say that God's righteousness is, in effect, God's commitment to bring honor and glory and praise to Himself and for His own name's sake.

In fact, one of the best definitions I've ever come across of God's righteousness is by John Piper. And he says that God's righteousness is His unswerving commitment to uphold and display the worth and value of His own name.

It is an unswerving commitment. He never alters course. He never does anything other than seek to uphold and preserve and display His own glory.

He never moves an inch in any other direction. In all that God does, He aims toward that one end. God and the unrighteousness of men leads us to move in the opposite direction.

[17 : 16] And the automatic response of a righteous and holy God is wrath toward those who go that direction rather than His direction.

It is the automatic response that He has. God does not respond to sin because some rule or principle outside of Himself requires Him to respond to it.

That's how our laws function. That's how our laws work. Or at least it's how they're intended to work. We have laws that we put in place and we expect those who are in charge of enforcing those laws and those who are in charge of imposing penalties upon those who break those laws, we expect them to follow the law whether they like the law or not, we expect them to follow it and then bring the penalty to bear upon those who have broken the law once it's been shown without a doubt that they have broken the law.

There is a standard, the law outside of the law enforcers to which they measure up. And if that standard requires punishment, they mete out punishment. But God does not bring His wrath to bear upon sinners because something outside of Him requires Him to do it.

God brings His wrath to bear upon sinners because His very character and nature requires Him to do it. Because if in all that He does, He is committed absolutely to the preservation and the display of His own glory, then He must, with infinite wrath, respond to those who would oppose His goal in all that He does.

[18 : 55] And so lastly, the last question I want to ask related to this business of the wrath of God against unrighteousness is to ask, so, granted that God is going to reveal His wrath against the unrighteous, when is that happening?

When does that happen? And I think that the normal response of a person who's been taught the Bible for very long would be to say, that happens on judgment day.

There's going to come a time when God will gather everyone who's ever lived together. He will separate the sheep from the goats is what Jesus says in the Gospels. And He will judge.

And all of us, all of us will stand to account. And on that day, the righteousness of God and the glory of God will be vindicated in the face of human unrighteousness unrighteousness and even satanic and demonic unrighteousness.

He will be vindicated in that day. And that's true. In fact, if you just look down to chapter 2, we have a reference to that day in chapter 2, verse 5. He says there, because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself, and here it is, on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be, and this is the same word in verse 18 of chapter 1, when it will be revealed.

[20 : 26] So there is a day that is coming when God will reveal His righteous judgment and His wrath. That's the day of wrath. That's the day of judgment.

And that's true. But one thing kept bothering me this week, and it's bothered me in the past as I've thought about Romans 1.18, one thing kept bothering me is that it doesn't say the wrath of God will be revealed from heaven.

You know what I'm saying? It doesn't say that. In fact, it doesn't say that in any English translation that I'm aware of because it's not what it says in the original. It's in the present tense. The wrath of God is revealed, or some translations say is being revealed from heaven.

Currently. Right now, the wrath of God is being revealed as we speak against ungodliness and unrighteousness.

This is not merely future. It's happening now. To which I respond, where? Where is it happening now? Because I don't see it on the news very often.

[21 : 38] I see terrible, horrible things happening in the world today. And what I don't see is the kind of righteous and dignit response that I would expect of a righteous and holy God immediately upon those people.

So right now, this morning, I have no doubt that in Syria and parts of Iraq, people are being beheaded. Christians?

Muslims, Muslims who refuse to conform to the radical Muslims in that area, are being killed and slaughtered and over the last few weeks have been by the thousands.

There was, until recently, a thriving Christian community in Iraq. Not big, but thriving, and they're now all but eradicated.

And they continue to amass power. They continue to grow. They continue to take city after city after city. Where's the wrath? I feel it.

[22 : 39] I'm angry. I would love to do something, but I don't own the bombs. I can't do anything. Where's the wrath, God? Where is it? We see it happen in the Old Testament. Fire drops down from the sky.

Holes open up and swallow people in the Old Testament. Even in the New Testament, don't lie about how much money you give. Alright? You may not give any, but don't lie about it because Ananias and Sapphira dropped dead when they lied to the Apostle Peter about how much money they were giving to the church.

We see it happening in the Bible, Old and New Testament, and we wonder, where's the wrath of God? If this verse is true, where can we see God's wrath presently being revealed?

There are three possible answers to that. One is that we do see God's wrath revealed in that the penalty of death continues to be imposed every day universally across the world. Millions and millions of people will die today.

Some from sickness, some from violence, some from old age, but millions of people will die today. And death is, as we have seen here and we see throughout Scripture, death is God's response to sin.

[23 : 52] So that's true. We could add to that. We could add, secondly, that the universality of human suffering is evidence that God's wrath is even right now being revealed against humanity. After all, our suffering is a part of the curse upon us from Genesis chapter 3.

When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and Adam fell, God imposed upon them suffering throughout their lives. Even for the most basic daily things, such as food, God says that they would obtain bread by the sweat of their brow.

They would suffer even for the most basic necessities of life. So suffering, whether it be minor suffering or major suffering, suffering exists in this world because of the sin of Adam and Eve and because of God's curse upon Adam and Eve and the earth when they sinned.

So merely the presence of death and suffering in the world, we could say, is evidence of the present outpouring of God's wrath in the world.

That's true, but that's not where Paul goes in Romans chapter 1. That's not at all where he goes. In fact, there is a strong connection between the present revealing of God's wrath here and the day of wrath in chapter 2, verse 5.

[25 : 09] Notice a few things that Paul says throughout chapter 1. Verse 24. says that because of their refusal to give honor and thanks to God, therefore, God gave them up in the lust of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.

Verse 26. Same word. For this reason, God gave them up to dishonorable passions. And then again in verse 28, since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

So three times in this chapter, we are told that God responds to unrighteousness, refusal to honor, glory, and give thanks to God by handing people over or giving them up to further sin.

Whatever form that sin might take. And we certainly see that happening in the world. We certainly see places where it seems as if sin compounds rather than eases up.

It gets worse generation after generation. That process is often by God's mercy interrupted by awakening and revival when God saves a large number of people and redeems us out of that.

[26 : 40] That process is often interrupted which is why the world still exists today. It wouldn't exist if God never interrupted that process. See that in the history of Israel? Over and over, Israel goes wayward from God.

God sends judgment and then God brings about a renewal and revival among the people of Israel. and they receive mercy and grace and things are better until they begin that process again. That's human history.

That's not the history of Israel. Merely that's human history. The world would not exist now if God didn't occasionally intervene. But nevertheless, apart from His intervention, the regular course of events is that God hands us over because of our refusal to honor Him.

He hands us over to further sin. Which brings us to chapter 2, verse 5 once more. And the connection between the present revealing of the wrath of God and the revelation on the day of wrath.

Notice how it's worded. He says in verse 5, because of your hard and impenitent heart. That is the status of the human heart apart from God's saving grace.

[27 : 51] Hard and impenitent. You see it in Pharaoh. Right? The difference between Moses and Pharaoh is that God encountered Moses in the burning bush and gave him a new heart. Pharaoh's heart continued to harden.

So, because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are continuing in sin. That is, because your sinning has grown worse and worse, due to what? In chapter 1.

The fact that God, rather than giving mercy, has handed them over to their sin. Because of that, they are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath.

So, the primary way in which Paul says the wrath of God is presently being revealed now in this time is that He hands people over to their sin so that they continue to grow worse in their sin and they begin to pile up deserved wrath.

So, wrath now is a piling up of wrath in the future. That's how the wrath of God is being revealed now against ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

[29 : 01] So, when we want and we wish that we would see God's wrath fall upon those who massacre and slaughter innocent people and we don't see it happen, we can have one of two responses.

We can say, there's no justice. God must not be just because He won't respond. Or we can say, holy cow, it's going to be bad for them. They are storing it up.

And He just continues to allow them to store it up and pile up the wrath that they're going to receive on that day. The wrath of God, His fixed, stable, eternal response to unrighteousness is being stored up even now as He hands people over for the day of wrath and the righteous judgment of God.

And the only reason that all of this is good news is because this verse, verse 18, is connected to verses 16 and 17 with the word for.

It's connected. It's not just hanging out there loosely. It's not just the beginning of a new section completely set apart from the thesis of verses 16 and 17. This is only good news because there's a remedy for it.

[30 : 28] We don't have righteousness. We do not possess within ourselves a desire to honor and glorify and give thanks to God as He deserves.

We have failed. and we deserve the wrath of God. We don't have the righteousness necessary to survive the righteous judgment of God.

And so, what do we get? We get someone else's righteousness in place of the righteousness that we lack. Theologians call this an alien righteousness because it doesn't belong to us because it's not ours.

An alien is a person who is situated somewhere that they're not native to. It's not their homeland. And we receive an alien righteousness because we receive through faith in Jesus as a gift from God, we receive a righteousness that's not ours.

God, Paul says in chapter 5, justifies the ungodly by faith. That means not that God takes the ungodly, makes them righteous, so that on the day of judgment, they're righteous enough to pass the judgment.

[31 : 44] That's not what it means when it says that He gives us righteousness. What He means is the righteousness by which we pass the judgment is not our own in any sense of the term except that God judicially decrees it and counts it to be ours when we trust in Jesus.

Justification does not mean that God makes us righteous or infuses righteousness into us so that we're now good enough to meet the standard. Justification means that God counts the righteousness of Jesus to be ours as if it were ours when it's not ours.

We get to receive through faith in Jesus an alien, foreign righteousness counted as ours so that the wrath of God is no longer poured out upon us.

but Jesus receives our unrighteousness and the wrath is poured out on Him.

That's good news for us. That's good news for your lost neighbors. It's good news for your lost family members. It's good news for your lost co-workers because it means no matter how long they have refused to give God the honor and glory that He deserves.

[33 : 10] There is another way. There is another righteousness that can be counted as theirs. And the catch is they must trust in the righteous one to receive His righteousness.

and you must proclaim the name of the righteous one and the availability of His righteousness to them if they are to trust in Him.

It's all free. It's all ours because of what Jesus has done but it can only be theirs if you point them toward Him.

And when you begin to do that, when you begin to faithfully say, let me tell you about Jesus. Let me tell you why I believe the way that I believe. When you begin to faithfully do that, the Spirit of God who is already at work begins to call people to Himself.

And you get to see and be a part of the righteousness of God being revealed and credited to those who formerly were objects of His wrath.

[34 : 26] Let's see you