

The Cross: A Symbol of Wrath or Righteousness

5.26.24

Message 5

Roman Series

Romans 1:18–32 (CSB)

¹⁸ For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, ¹⁹ since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse. ²¹ For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles.

²⁴ Therefore God delivered them over in the desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen.

²⁶ For this reason God delivered them over to disgraceful passions. Their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ The men in the same way also left natural relations with women and were inflamed in their lust for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their error.

²⁸ And because they did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God, God delivered them over to a corrupt mind so that they do what is not right. ²⁹ They are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness. They are full of envy, murder, quarrels, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ senseless, untrustworthy, unloving, and

unmerciful. ³² Although they know God's just sentence—that those who practice such things deserve to die—they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them.

Introduction

A. What is your reaction to hearing this passage for the first time?

1. Shock?
2. Confusion?
3. Overwhelmed?
4. Offended?
5. Depressed?

B. The Apostle Paul wrote this letter from Corinth and sent it with a woman named Phoebe (Romans 16).

1. Phoebe's job as a letter carrier was to safely take the message to Rome and then read it.
 - a. It's unlikely that thousands of people gathered.
 - b. There might not have been hundreds of people for the first reading.
2. But the first audience could not actually read this repeatedly like we will.
 - a. Instead, they heard it for the first time, like some of us in the room today.
 - b. And some of them might have felt these same emotions:
 1. Shock
 2. Overwhelmed
 3. Offended.

C. In this passage, Paul focuses his attention on the Gentile audience.

1. Assuming there is a mix of Jewish background believers and Gentile background believers, Paul first addresses the Gentiles.

2. The Jewish background believers would have been happy hearing this:

a. Here is Paul addressing the sins that are more common to Gentiles than Jews.

b. It's like when a preacher starts preaching against all the things other people are doing wrong:

c. We like it better when the preacher is talking about someone else's sins instead of our own.

3. The Jews are probably pretty happy right here, but the non-Jews are getting it with both barrels.

D. If you have read ahead in Romans, you will notice there is not much hope from here till Romans 3:21

1. The first three chapters of Romans tell the reader that they are lost and cannot save themselves.

2. **If you believe you can save yourself, you will try that first.**

3. As Paul presents the Gospel to Rome, he ensures the Romans know that, without Christ, they are absolutely lost and under God's wrath.

a. Good, moral people rarely seek salvation apart from themselves.

b. Good people think they are good by following law or having a good reputation with others.

c. Good people think that, as long as they are not as bad as their neighbor, then they are ok.

d. **The standard of good and righteousness is not another person; it's Jesus, and we all fall short.**

e. Paul said in Romans 3:23, All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

f. That word glory is going to come up a lot.

Key Words in Romans 1:18-32

A. There is too much to cover in one message, which is why we will spend a few weeks examining this passage from different angles.

1. Several keywords we must notice are:

2. Righteousness, wrath, revelation, glory, knowledge.

3. As you read this passage at home, notice these words.

a. How often are they repeated?

b. Where does Paul use these words in the rest of the letter?

c. How does this fit with the rest of what Paul is saying?

B. Paul begins this segment with God's wrath.

1. He has already expressed the beauty of the Gospel.

2. In verse 17, Paul said that in the Gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith, and believers live by faith.

3. And now he flips to the other side of the coin:

a. To live apart from God is to be unrighteous.

b. And the unrighteous experience wrath.

4. This other side is introduced by the repeated word "for".

1. God's wrath is revealed from heaven. Vs. 18

A. Wrath is the divine anger and judgment God has toward sin.

1. God's wrath is both present and future.

2. God will not only judge sin in the future but He judges sin now.

3. This wrath is a sign of God's goodness and His trustworthiness.

a. A good God cannot allow sin, injustice, or wrong to not be judged and punished.

b. A good God cannot play favorites, giving some people a pass while others suffer the full consequences of their sin.

4. Thus Paul declares that God's wrath is revealed from heaven upon all godlessness and unrighteousness.

B. Notice where this wrath originates.

1. It is God's wrath.

a. Not Mother Nature, or Israel's, or Satan's.

b. God's wrath is revealed.

c. The word revealed is the word Apocalypse.

a. Apocalypse simply means revealing or showing.

b. This revelation of God's wrath, his divine anger and punishment, comes from heaven, a place of perfect holiness.

2. This should catch our attention.

a. Whatever God's wrath looks like in the present, it is not wrong.

b. God's wrath comes from a place of perfect truth.

1. Human judges make mistakes in their sentencing.

2. But God is the perfect judge who sees all and knows all.

3. God is a righteous judge, but still a judge.

c. Righteousness and wrath go together.

1. **Romans 1:17-18 (CSB)**

¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: **The righteous will live by faith.**"

¹⁸For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth,

d. Because righteousness is good, then wrath is good.

1. James 1:17 says everything good comes from God.

2. That includes the right standing and relationship of righteousness AND the wrath of God upon those who reject Him.

C. Notice also that **Wrath is active, not passive.**

1. God is not passive-aggressive when it comes to righteousness and wrath.

2. God is active.

a. God is active in extending to us righteousness, right relationship, through Jesus.

1. The Father took the initiative.

2. Jesus was not passive in going to the Cross, He was active. (2 Cor. 5:21)

3. When we confess our sins and profess our belief in Jesus, God actively imputes to us righteousness.

b. God is also active in wrath.

1. As we will see in the phrases, "God gave them over" or "God delivered them over," these are divine actions, not merely consequences.

2. This is more than the natural degradation of sin.

- a. There is a natural progression of sin.
 - b. Nothing ever evolves into order but always descends into chaos.
3. But this is MORE than natural decay and degradation.
- a. This is God doing what He promised.
 - b. **We either live in God's righteousness or under God's wrath.**
4. And if you are NOT clothed in Jesus' righteousness right now, you are under God's wrath.

2. What are the objects of wrath?

¹⁸ For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, ¹⁹ since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse.

A. The rest of the passages list many forms of godlessness and unrighteousness.

1. Many of them are sexual in nature.
2. All are opposed to God's glory and character.

B. Godlessness and Unrighteousness begin when people "suppress" the truth.

1. The word used for "suppress" means to hold or push down.
2. It's the same word we would use to keep something from coming up or surfacing.
3. When people push away God and His revelation from allowing it to change their lives, it leads to ungodliness and unrighteousness.

- a. This is what Adam and Eve did.
- b. They knew what God had said but they suppressed it, pushed it aside, and pushed it down.
- c. They didn't want the truth, that all who eat of this tree will die, dictate what they wanted.

C. Paul tells the Romans and us that God has revealed Himself to humanity through creation, Jesus, and the Scripture that He inspired.

1. Why are all people without excuse?
2. Because God has made it plain.
3. Next week we will dig into this deeper.

3. How can wrath and righteousness co-exist?

A. Two Old Testament pictures of how righteousness and wrath can both exist at the same time:

1. First, consider Noah and his family.

- a. Genesis 6:5–8 (CSB)

⁵When the LORD saw that human wickedness was widespread on the earth and that every inclination of the human mind was nothing but evil all the time, ⁶the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and he was deeply grieved. ⁷Then the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I created, off the face of the earth, together with the animals, creatures that crawl, and birds of the sky—for I regret that I made them." ⁸Noah, however, found favor with the LORD.

- b. Because Noah and his family believed the Word of the Lord and acted upon God's instructions, they were saved in the midst of God's wrath upon the Earth.

- c. The Ark was a place of the Gospel, but outside the Ark, humanity experienced God's wrath toward sin.

2. Second, consider the example of Israel in Egypt.

a. In the latter plagues upon Egypt, God spared the homes of the Jews in Goshen, while all around them the unbelief and unrighteousness of Egypt experienced the wrath of God.

b. The ultimate expression of this was the 10th plague, when an Angel of Death went to and fro through Egypt, killing the firstborn of everyone UNLESS the Angel saw the blood of a lamb upon the doorposts.

c. Those INSIDE and under the protection were spared, while those outside experienced wrath.

3. For those who believe in Jesus, we experience all of God's goodness in His love for us:

a. We receive grace, mercy, forgiveness, salvation, justification, and so much more.

b. But those who are outside, those who are not in Christ, and have not had the Blood of Jesus applied to their lives, receive God's wrath.

4. Did Jesus not demonstrate this to the two men on the crosses?

a. One rejected Jesus and entered eternity without promise, without hope, and without mercy.

b. The other accepted Jesus and received the promise of mercy, love, and eternal life.

c. The same cross that gave Good News to one gave hard news to the other.

d. The Cross is the symbol of God's wrath and God's righteousness.

B. For those of us who believe, wrath is not our promise.

1. 1 Thessalonians 5:9–10 (CSB)

⁹For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

2. 1 Thessalonians has a future wrath in view:

a. The Day of the Lord, when God pours out His wrath upon the Earth one more time.

b. The Day when all nations, tongues, and people are judged by and through Jesus.

c. Those who believe and live by faith, they receive eternal life.

e. Those who reject and suppress the truth receive the eternal wrath of God through eternal death.

3. For the believer, Jesus' return is called the Blessed Hope.

4. For the unbeliever, Jesus' return signals the fullness of God's wrath.

Apply: Which side of the Cross are you on?

¹⁸For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth,

A. When you live like there is no God, you suppress the truth.

B. Godlessness and unrighteousness are already condemned, waiting the full revelation of God's wrath.

C. But there is forgiveness for ALL who believe.

1. Remember verse 16?

2. Romans 1:16 (CSB)

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek.

3. All who believe receive salvation.
 - a. That includes you.
 - b. The same God who has the power to condemn in His wrath also saves everyone who believes.
 - c. This morning, I hope that includes you.

Prayer:

- A. Today if you are not right with God, please don't wait another day.
 1. Let me pray with you.
 2. Better yet, have your neighbor or someone you love and trust who is in the room today pray with you and walk you through this moment.
 3. But don't let this moment pass.
 4. Each time we reject the work of the Spirit, we suppress God's truth, and we walk in godlessness and unrighteousness.
- B. For many of us in the room, what we need is God's help in this present season.
 1. This time is for you too.
 2. For all who are tired, and weary, and anxious, and heavy burdened, the Lord still wants to give you rest.
 3. He still heals, and restores, and provides.
 4. Every weekend, I want us to set aside time and space to pray for what is heavy on our hearts.

Prayer