

The Wrath of God

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Date: 19 April 2015

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[0 : 0 0] Well, in verse 18, if you've got your Bibles there, Paul writes, The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people.

Well, welcome to Holy Trinity. Aren't you glad you came this morning? And for those visiting, aren't you glad you picked today? It's one of those passages, isn't it?

A very heavy kind of passage. And so the first thing I want us to do before we get into the passage is to think about what God's wrath is, to understand God's anger.

The word wrath means fierce anger, which often leads to judgment. And for many people, the fact that God is angry seems out of place.

I mean, isn't anger wrong? And how can a loving God be angry? These are the questions people often have. And so to answer the first question, there are times when it is right to be angry.

[1 : 0 3] There is such a thing as right anger. When that 17-year-old Massa was stabbed here in Doncaster a few weeks ago, people were angry. And when Sean Price, in my relation to me, just for the record, was arrested, people were angry at him.

People were really angry at him and wanted him to see him brought to justice. And rightly so, for what he did was evil, was it not? Or to bring it closer to home, when our daughter gets bullied by some older girls at school simply because she goes to church, then I get angry because that's not right.

Or closer still, if someone was to hurt someone you loved, one of your children or spouse or whoever, then you would get angry, wouldn't you?

Because it wouldn't be right. There is such a thing as right anger, you see. Of course, we've got to be careful that our right anger doesn't well up and overflow into wrong anger, revenge.

But there is such a thing as right anger, and that's the anger that God has. He has a right wrath. But of course, people still then ask, well, isn't God supposed to be loving? How can he be angry anyway?

[2 : 1 6] And the answer is, God is angry because he loves us. I see some people think that the opposite of anger is love, that they're opposites. But that is not true. There was a kid at my father's school.

My father used to be a high school teacher, maths. And he found out that one of his students was told by the student's father, here's \$100, mate.

Friday night, here's \$100. I don't want to see you for the rest of the weekend. I don't care what you do, just go away. That's what he did every weekend. Gave his son \$100 and said, I don't want to see you until Sunday night. And so the son did all sorts of things, bad things as well.

And not once did that son's father get angry. Now, is that loving? Of course not. It's unloving, isn't it? Uncaring.

And that's the opposite of love. Rather, God is angry because he loves us. It's like that story I told on Good Friday, if you were here. Do you remember that story about one of my daughters who ran off from us after visiting the Melbourne Zoo?

[3 : 17] We told her to stop, you know, the sign, stop. But she ignored us, kept going, and she was nearly ran over by a car. And we were thankful that she wasn't. But we were angry.

Because what she did, ignoring us, was not right. But also, we were angry because ignoring us meant she nearly died. See, our anger was actually because we loved her.

And it's the same with God. He loves us and wants what's best for us. If he didn't get angry, it would mean he didn't care. Now, I've spent a bit of time on understanding this anger, and deliberately so, because more and more people these days, even Christians, don't, well, ignore the idea of God's wrath, God's anger.

God's punishment. Hell. They write against. I've seen Christian articles that deny God's wrath and hell.

And so we need to understand it rightly. God's anger is right, and it is because he loves us. And so what is God angry about, which is point one? Well, verse 18 told us. If you've got your Bibles there, have a look again at verse 18.

[4 : 25] He says, See, God is angry because of people's unrighteousness, because of their wickedness.

In other words, God is angry at people's wrong living or sin, from stabbing 17-year-olds to the hurtful words we say and think about others. He's angry because he loves us, and he doesn't want to see that happen.

He knows the way we live is unhelpful, and so he's angry for the way we live. I mean, you only have to look at the news to see the effects of selfishness and sin, don't you?

Ultimately, though, God is angry about what this wickedness or unrighteousness really does. Verse 18 says, it says, They suppress the truth by their wickedness.

What truth? Well, it's the truth that Jeff spoke about, the truth that God is God of us, that he made us and owns us and so ought to be worshipped by us. It's the truth that God is God.

[5 : 40] But when we live our own way and do what we want, we're acting like there is no God. We act like there is no God by our actions, you see.

We're denying the truth by the way we live. Let me see if I can illustrate. I've got a bin here. Thanks, man.

My beautiful assistant. Thank you. All right. So imagine we've got a bin here on the next slide. Here we are. All right. So we've got the truth.

It's pretty clear that what the truth is. I feel bad. I've got to go and get up. But you see what happens?

My action denies the truth that is there. Or take the next slide, for example. This guy's action denies the truth that there are spots for handicapped people, that they should be left.

[6 : 42] You see, our actions are denying the truth. And when we live our own way and ignore God, we're denying the truth that he is God and that he should determine how we live. We suppress that truth by our actions.

Of course, someone might then say, well, I didn't even know there was a God in the first place. But Paul says we should have known because God has made it plain.

Have a look at verse number 19. He says, I used to be a grade 6 school teacher and I heard some pretty inventive excuses for not having done homework.

My favourite was this one. This kid said, I didn't do my homework because I didn't want to add to your workload. I was tempted to let him off for that one.

Now, there are legitimate excuses, of course. You know, I was sick and so on. But when it comes to knowing that there is a God, when it comes to knowing there is a God that we ought to worship, there's no legitimate excuse, says Paul.

[8 : 06] All people ought to know there is a God over us who made us. It's been made plain, verse 19. How has it been made plain? Well, verse 20, by creation.

You see, the design and wonder of our world screams out that there is a designer behind it, a powerful and divine God. For example, the tilt of the earth and the distance of the moon all works together to stabilise the earth and prevent it from freezing over.

It's spot on. You don't get that kind of order from some random event. There is a designer behind it all, a creator. As we heard from Psalm 19, the heavens declare, they scream, the glory of God.

Now, of course, we cannot know everything there is to know about God from creation. Interestingly, the psalmist, in our first reading, goes on to talk about God's law in the Bible, which tells us more about God.

But creation is still enough to tell us the truth that there is a God. It still tells us that there is a creator who, in Paul's words, has eternal power and a divine nature.

[9 : 14] It tells us that there is one who ought to be worshipped and thanked, but instead, verse 21, for although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal human beings and birds and animals and reptiles.

On the next slide, I saw a church sign that said, don't let worries kill you, let the church help. I know what they were trying to say.

I love the delayed laughter. We slowly get it. Next slide, though. This one really made me think. Give God what's right, not what's left.

Now, it's not talking just about money, what's left of our money kind of thing. It's talking about giving God the glory and thanks he deserves as well. Giving God the honour he deserves.

[10 : 20] But we don't always do this, do we? We often forget about God or ignore God or make bargains with God. You know, God, if you get me out of this situation or if you heal my friend, so and so, then I'll start thanking you more.

Then I'll do this and so on and so on. Instead of simply bowing before him and trusting him. Sometimes we even know what God says but think, well, look, the world makes a good point and, you know, it doesn't make sense to me after all so I'll ignore what God says and go with what I think and the world says.

And so instead of giving God what's right, our thinking becomes futile and our hearts darkened, Paul says. We think we're wise and we know what's best and we can determine what's right and wrong but we become foolish, says Paul, because we exchange the glory of the immortal God for ourselves, for society or in Paul's day for images and statues carved in the likeness of birds and animals and that's ludicrous when you think about it.

I mean, it would be like exchanging a real Ferrari for a matchbox toy. It's just ludicrous. Or a billion dollars for some monopoly money.

It's silly and in the end it's actually idolatry. An idol, idolatry is worshipping an idol and an idol is anything that replaces God. It doesn't have to be a physical idol or statue of a bird or a reptile or Buddha or whatever.

[11 : 49] It can be anything that is more important to us than God. Anything we place as a higher priority than God. Anything we serve above God whether it be money or work or sport or kids or family.

I was doing some work in bed one night. Michelle had fallen asleep beside me and when Michelle woke up in the morning she was rather put out because apparently I'd fallen asleep with my arm around my MacBook computer instead of Michelle.

And she jokingly said that she had dropped down the list of my priorities. For the record she is more important than my MacBook. But you see we've all done that to God. We've chosen to put things above him.

To serve things above him. To let things determine our priorities and shape our lives more than God shapes our lives. This is the fundamental problem with humanity.

Which is why Paul repeats this idea in verse 25. If I look at verse 25 he says they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the creator who is forever praised.

[13 : 05] Amen. Or verse 28 furthermore verse 28 just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God so God gave them over to a depraved mind. So they gave up the knowledge of God you see.

They didn't think it was literally worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God and so God gave them over to a worthless mind. See this is the fundamental problem of humanity.

Our actions have suppressed the truth that God is God and then we've replaced God with something else something lesser. We've exchanged the truth and glory of God the creator for something which is not God.

Something which is created which is less than God. And that's not right nor is it good for us. And so God is rightly angry you see. The wrath of God is being revealed.

Why? Because of our godlessness and unrighteousness which ignores the fact that God is God and has replaced him with something else we serve. That's why God is angry. But how is God's anger being revealed which is a point two.

[14 : 08] Notice verse 18 it's in the present tense it's happening now. The wrath of God is being revealed. Did you notice that? It's being revealed it's happening now. We usually think it's just to be shown on the last day on judgment day.

And that's true but he's actually started to reveal it now. It's like a thunderstorm. We've had one this morning. A thunderstorm starts with a few drops of rain and then often builds up to thunder, lightning, hail, whatever.

And it's a bit like God's wrath. It has already started now. We've seen it in Genesis 3 with death coming into the world and it will build up and it will culminate on the last day, the day of judgment.

But the question is how is it being revealed now? How do we see it? Well, verse 24, it says, therefore God gave them over to the sinful desires of their hearts.

Or come down to verse 26, because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Or verse 28, again, so God gave them over to a depraved mind.

[15 : 15] Do you see the repetition of that phrase? God gave them over. That's how God's wrath is being revealed, by giving us over to our sinful desires, to suffer our desires and their consequences, to do what we want.

Now, at first glance, that might seem like a good thing, getting to do what we want, giving us over to our desires, but it leads to all sorts of problems, consequences. Listen to how it's described in the rest of verse 24.

He says, God gave them over to desires of their hearts, to sexual impurity, for the degrading of their bodies, with one another. And then verse 26, he gave them over to shameful lusts, even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.

And in the same way, the men abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lusts for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

And so it continues, furthermore, they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a worthless mind, so that they do what not ought to be done. They become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, depravity.

[16 : 26] They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God haters, insolent, arrogant, boastful. They invent ways of doing evil.

They disobey their parents. They have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Now, it's not a particularly pleasant reading list, is it?

God's wrath is revealed by giving us over to our desires, to live according to them, to be enslaved by them, and to suffer the consequences of them. That's what's happened here.

I imagine a child is told to come to dinner, to eat dinner, come to the table from his room to come and eat dinner, but instead the child rejects the parents' request and follows their own desires.

They say, that's yuck, I don't want to eat that, and go back to playing in their room. This is purely hypothetical, okay? It's never happened in our house. And so we gave him over to his sinful desire.

[17 : 31] And we said, well, if you don't want to eat dinner, play in your room, that's fine, do that. But of course, our child emerged sometime later, only to find that all the dinner had been cleared away.

And so when they asked for something to eat, we said, dinner's finished. There's no more food. That time has passed. It's gone. And so they got nothing to eat. You see, their sinful desire became their punishment.

And they suffered the consequence of their own sinful choice. That's what God has done. It's not as though he just lets us go. He actually gives us over and says, you want that?

That's fine. Have it. But it comes with all these things as well. And so we cannot blame God for our fallen world. We've brought these consequences on ourselves.

He's simply given us over to what we wanted. Oh, sure, following sinful desires might be pleasing for a while, but it eventually leads to pain. And so if we follow our desire of resentment and revenge instead of forgiveness, it will lead to conflict.

[18 : 34] If we follow our desire of greed and envy instead of being content, then it will only lead to bitterness. And if we follow our desire instead of God's, it will ultimately lead to death and final judgment.

Verse 32. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things, but also approve of those who practice them.

See, God rightly says that those who do such things deserve death, eternal death. And people know in their heart that certain crimes deserve severe punishment.

We all have this inbuilt sense of justice, don't we? But even though we all know ignoring God is serious, people continue to deny him anyway.

They continue to do things their own way, and they even approve of others who do the same. Now, this is a very bleak picture of humanity, isn't it? But it's a painfully familiar one.

[19 : 34] As I said at the start, you only have to turn on the news or look around to see that people still gossip and slander and murder and invent ways of doing evil. I mean, just look at the internet and how people have used the internet to invent more ways of doing evil.

I mean, why do you think we need more laws? Because people invent more ways of doing wrong. And because of this, we see God's wrath revealed by people suffering the consequences of their own sin.

And sadly, others get caught up in it as well. But because God prefers to show love than wrath, because he is grieved when others suffer and get caught up in it with the sins of others, like the 17-year-old, he doesn't leave us all to suffer judgment forever.

Rather, because he prefers to show love rather than wrath, he takes the wrath we deserve on himself through Jesus. This is our last point, point three. You see, God's anger has also been revealed upon himself through his son, Jesus.

For at the cross, we see Jesus suffer the full extent of God's wrath at our sin, so that we might not have to face it on judgment day. You see, there's a very important word right at the start of our passage that our translations leave out.

[20 : 47] If you look at verse 18, the very first word that starts verse 18 is actually the word because. It's left out of the air of our English translations and it's important because it joins these verses with the ones that Paul has just mentioned before, that we looked at last week.

Have a look there at verse 16 to 18. Let me show you the logic. Paul says, I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

because in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed. It's given to us. A righteousness that is by faith from first to last.

Just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith. Why do we need this? Well, because, verse 18, the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and unrighteousness of people.

Do you see the logic? Paul is not ashamed of the gospel because in it he gives us a righteousness, a right standing with God and we need that right standing because verse 18, wrath is being revealed against our unrighteousness.

[21 : 56] See, the gospel is the great news that changes everything as we saw last week. For in the gospel we hear that God has taken the wrath we deserve upon himself in Jesus so that we might be forgiven and made right with him.

So that we who deserve eternal death might be saved and receive eternal life. And if you're here this morning and you see yourself in these verses as someone who perhaps gossips or slanders, disobeys parents, who hasn't acknowledged God as God, even though creation screams it, then the good news is that you can be forgiven.

You can be made right with God by turning to Jesus and believing in him. So the first question is, have you done that? Have you trusted in Jesus?

Jesus, you believe in him, that he died for you, that he rose again to make you right with God. Because if we believe, then God's promises we are now right with him. Just like that.

And for those of us who have, then we had to do three things. First, we had to do what we can to share this news, this gospel with others. Pray for opportunities to share the gospel and support events that proclaim it.

[23 : 09] You see, there are all sorts of needs in the world, but the greatest need is to be saved from God's wrath and forgiven. The former treasurer of Australia, Peter Costello, spoke at a clergy conference, a minister's conference I was at a number of years ago, and he said this.

He said, after over a decade in government, he just needed to point out that fact. You know, they've been there for a decade, they're that good. But he said this, after a decade in government, we worked out that all we could do to solve the problems in society was to tax and to spend.

Tax people and spend money on programs to help. But they were only ever band-aid solutions, he said. But you people, you ministers, he was saying, have the gospel, and that's the real solution.

It's the best thing I heard all conference. And he's right. Only the message of Jesus deals with the issue of rejecting God as God. Only the gospel deals with the problem of suffering his wrath on judgment day.

So we're to do what we can to keep sharing it. And the second thing is we're to continue treating God as God, as the top priority, not something else which is an idol, whether it's family or sport or money or our comfort, you know, being lazy when it comes to serving God.

[24 : 27] I remember when we started our 4pm service, because we didn't have, you know, this kind of relaxed family service in the morning. I was really encouraged by one particular family, well, a number of families actually, but one family, because they had just come back from holidays, they travelled most of the day, arrived home at 3.30, tired, but instead of unpacking the caravan and relaxing, they washed their faces and hightailed it up to church to listen to God and to meet with his people.

Why? Because God was their God. God of their family, not comfort nor relaxation. Trevor's just had a baby girl.

He's here with his daughter, meeting with God's people. These are people who serve God as God. Top priority. We need to keep serving him for who he is.

And the third thing we're to do is we're to remember God's wrath so that we might continue to give God the glory and thanks he deserves for the gospel. You see, no one likes talking about God's anger or wrath at sin.

I don't like talking about it, but we must remember it so that we can truly see how glorious the gospel is. So that we can really see how great the Lord Jesus is and how grand God's grace is.

[25 : 44] Let me see if I can put it like this. On the next slide is a picture of a star. You can see it just. Okay? And the star might represent the gospel, but if you put the gospel against the black of God's wrath on the next slide, so much clearer, isn't it?

It stands out. I mean, think about the diamonds. You know what they do with the diamonds? They show you a diamond and then they put a black cloth behind it. And then you can see it dazzling in all its beauty. See, we must remember God's wrath so that we can see the beauty of the gospel even more clearly and how great that news truly is.

And so serve God as God with great joy and thanks, praising the one who saved us. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you even for this bad news that your wrath is rightly being revealed from heaven.

And we thank you for this bad news because it makes your good news seem so much better. The good news that through Jesus we can be saved from the wrath we deserve, brought into your family and given life eternal.

Father, help us to always rejoice in this gospel. Help us to always serve you as God. And help us always to praise the one who saved us.

[27 : 12] We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.