

The Wrath of God

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[0:00] Well, as you remain standing, let me lead us in prayer. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you that you, as our choir so wonderfully reminded us this morning, are building your church, and you are building it through the good news of the gospel.

Yet, Father, the gospel of Jesus is only good news because of the bad news which we are looking at this morning. And so, Father, we pray that you would give us minds to understand your word on this difficult topic.

But more than that, give us hearts to live in light of it. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, there are all sorts of things that move us emotionally.

For some, it's a good movie like this one, the next slide. Thanks, Henry. It's the Titanic. You might remember this scene with Leonardo DiCaprio on the bow of the ship and the music's playing.

It moved my wife to tears, as it did myself, but for different reasons, because it was really long. Of course, for most Australians, it's sport that gets the emotions going.

[1:18] Do we have any Hawks supporters here this morning? Yeah, there was a good game on Saturday. Did any Collingwood supporters here? Yeah. You're not going to put up your hand, are you?

But, you know, after the sport, that gets the emotions going as well. Well, God is not an unmoved God. The Bible tells us that he also expresses emotions towards us.

He loves us, for example. He is pleased with us. He can also, though, be grieved by us. And indeed, he grieves over us.

For example, Jesus wept over Jerusalem. But as we'll see today in the rest of Romans chapter 1, God is also angry. Now, for many people, God's anger is at odds with God's love.

They say, how can a God of love be angry? But this is to misunderstand the nature of anger. You see, anger is not the opposite to love.

[2:18] In fact, it's because God loves us so much that he gets so angry. And it's the same with us. Just the other day, one of my children was doing the wrong thing, mucking around, jumping on her bed.

And I said, stop that, because you'll hurt yourself. And she did. She banged her head on the wooden frame and caused a lump. And my heart ached.

Yet at the same time, I was furious. I was angry at her because I don't want to see her hurt. You see, it's because I loved her, and still do, by the way, because I love her that I was so angry with her.

And it's the same with God. You see, a God who both loves and gets angry at sin is very compatible. In fact, the opposite of love is actually indifference.

You see, if God just was indifferent towards us, if he just didn't care, he wouldn't get angry and he wouldn't love. That's the opposite of love. That's not anger. But of course, unlike our anger, which is so often irrational and unmeasured, God's anger is always measured and appropriate.

[3 : 33] But it is personal. We reject him who made us. That's pretty personal. And in the process of rejecting him, we have hurt ourselves and one another.

And so God who loves us is also angry with us. And his anger is being revealed upon us, which brings me to point one.

There's an outline on the back of your inserts, but we're going to pick it up at verse 18. Verse 18. Now, the word wrath or wrath, if you're American, means fierce anger.

It's often fierce anger that results in judgment. And verse 18 says that God's wrath is against or upon all the godlessness and wickedness of people.

And if you think our world is not that wicked, you only have to turn on the news to see that that's not the case. I mean, just this past week alone, we've had a shooting in Colorado. Have you heard about that?

[4 : 41] A person walks into a cinema, shoots 12 dead, wounds 60 others. The youngest killed was six years old. In Sydney, an 18-year-old this weekend was charged with bashing another teenager to death.

And his mates outside protested by attacking the camera crew. Or in our schools, we have to teach children about stranger danger so that they don't get abducted. In fact, earlier this year, some friends we know received a letter from their school warning them that a van had tried to pick up children from their children's school.

There is wickedness in the world. But that's not the real problem. The real problem is that people suppress the truth by their wickedness. See verse 18 again.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.

Now, what truth is Paul talking about here? Well, it's the truth that there is a God of our world who ought to be worshipped and served. It's the truth that God is God and we are not.

[5 : 51] But when we live our own way and when we do what we want, we're effectively saying there is no God. Our actions are suppressing the truth that there is a God, you see. But we all ought to know there is a God who we should worship.

See verse 19? It says, I used to be a grade 6 primary school teacher and I heard some pretty inventive excuses for why they didn't do their homework.

One of my favourites was, I didn't do it because I didn't want to add to your workload. I let him off.

It was that good. Of course, there are more legitimate excuses like I was sick or I was away on holidays and so on. But there is no excuse for not knowing there is a God of our world.

You see, all people ought to know there is a God because God has made it plain to us all. How? Well, verse 20, through creation. You see, the design and wonder of our world screams out that there is a designer behind it all.

[7 : 12] 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 the distance from the sun means that we don't freeze over and so on and so on.

It's amazing how well our world is ordered. And it screams out that there is a designer behind it all. A creator. As we heard from Psalm 19, the heavens declare the glory of God.

Day after day, creation pours forth speech that there is a God. Now, of course, we cannot know everything there is to know about God from creation. Interestingly, the psalmist of Psalm 19 also knew that, which is why he spoke about God's law in the second half of the psalm.

The Bible, which tells us more about God. But creation still tells us there is a God. It tells us that there is a creator who, in Paul's words, has eternal power and a divine nature.

It tells us there is one who ought to be worshipped and thanked. But instead, verse 21, although they knew God, that God is God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him.

[8 : 20] But their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. I saw a church signboard the other day. There's a slide of it, Henry. It said, don't let worries kill you.

Let the church help. Think about it. I'm sure that's not exactly what they were trying to get at. You know what they were getting at, don't you? I saw another church sign, though.

The next slide. A bit more serious. It says, give God what's right, not what's left. Now, it's not talking necessarily about money. It's talking about giving God what he deserves.

It's talking about giving God the thanks and worship he deserves as God, instead of just waiting until we're desperate and saying, oh, God, if you get me out of this mess, then I'll worship you. You know, it's giving him what's left over kind of thing.

But as verse 21 said, people neither worship God as God nor gave him thanks. Instead, their unrighteous or wicked desire to live their own way or our own way has suppressed the truth that God is God and has led to futile thinking and darkened hearts.

[9 : 24] So much so, verse 22, that 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.

Or verse 25, they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the creator who is forever praised.

Or verse 28, furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a worthless mind. You see, instead of acknowledging the truth that God is God and so seeking to worship him, to give him what is right, people have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for mere images of mortal things, which is ludicrous when you think about it.

It would be like exchanging a real Ferrari for a matchbox toy bicycle. It just wouldn't do it. But that's what's happened. What's more, they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God and so exchange the truth of God for a lie and worship created things rather than the creator.

And in the end, this is idolatry. Idolatry is replacing God with something else. It doesn't have to be a physical idol or statue of a bird and reptile, as it's mentioned here.

[10 : 50] It can be anything that is worshipped above God. Someone once summarized the idols of Australians with the letter B. He said Australians worship body, brains and bucks, to which you could add sport and family.

These are the sorts of things that people have as idols in their life. Another person blames the computer company Apple for producing iTunes and the iPod, iPad, iPhone and with them all, idolatry.

Whatever it is, humanity has worshipped and served it, the created things rather than the creator who is forever praised. Amen. And so, because of this, God's wrath against humanity is being revealed now.

Point two. Now, when most people think about God's wrath or judgment, they think about the day of God's wrath or the day of judgment. They think it will all happen in the future. And it will certainly culminate then.

But verse 18 says that God's wrath is being revealed. That is, it's happening now. And the word revealed means more than just shown. It means accomplished or brought about.

[12 : 02] So God's wrath is being shown and brought about now. That's what verse 18 is saying. How? Well, by God giving people what they want. Let's pick it up at verse 24.

Because they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for idols, therefore, verse 24, You see, it says here, God is revealing his anger in judgment by giving humanity over to their sinful desires, to what they want.

Now, at first, getting what you want might sound good, but not when you see how it's described. It's described in verse 24 as the degrading of our bodies. Or verse 26, Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.

Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, men also 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.

Now, these verses are clearly speaking about homosexuality. And at a time when legislation about gay marriages is on the agenda, it's worth pausing for a moment just to say a few things about this.

[13 : 20] First, God is clearly against homosexuality. He still loves homosexuals, but he's clearly against homosexuality. And I need to say that because there are churches in our own diocese who don't believe that.

They believe homosexuality is okay. Second, it's no more, however, no more sinful than any other sin. Do you notice it's put right alongside heterosexual immorality in verse 24.

And later on, it's put alongside being arrogant or disobeying parents, verse 30. It's no more sinful than other sins, which Paul goes on to describe in a moment.

Third, there does seem to be a focus on it, however, but only because I think it illustrates the fundamental sin of rejecting God.

You see, homosexuality here is described as unnatural. It goes against the way things are created. And that's exactly what we do when we reject God. We go against the created all, the way things were created, when we try and play God, but we're not.

[14 : 25] It's unnatural, like homosexuality. And I think that's why it gets more of a focus here. But it's no more sinful than other sins, which Paul now goes on to mention in verse 28.

So he says, Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over, there's that phrase again, to a depraved mind or worthless mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.

And they've become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful.

They invent ways of doing evil. They disobey their parents. And they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, and no mercy. Do you notice three times it says we reject God, and three times it says God gives us over.

There's a pattern here, do you see? Let me show you. Verse 23, they exchanged the immortal God for mortal things. Therefore, verse 24, God gave them over. Or verse 25, people worshipped and served creative things rather than God the creator.

[15 : 34] And so, verse 26, God gave them over. Again, verse 28, here they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, and so God gave them over to a worthless mind.

You see the pattern here? People reject God as God, and so God gives them over to their sinful desires. And the point of this pattern is that the most basic sin from which all other sin comes from is rejecting God as God.

That is, rejecting God is the fundamental sin that leads to more sin, like these listed here. Now, as I said before, at first it might sound okay that God is giving us over to our desires, to what we want.

But as you can see from these verses, it's not really a good way to live. No, God is giving us over to our sinful desires and choices, to live according to them, to be enslaved by them, and also to suffer the consequences of them.

Imagine a child is told to come to the dinner table to eat dinner, but instead they reject the parent's request and follow their own sinful desire to play in their room instead.

[16 : 42] I'm speaking hypothetically here, of course, because this never happens in our house. But the parents then give them over to their sinful choice and say, well, fine, off you go, go to your room. And then the child emerges sometime later only to find that all the dinner has cleared away.

See, they got what they want, didn't they? But they also missed out and suffered. That's what God is doing here. He has given us over to our sinful desires, and that is our punishment because our sinful desires have caused all sorts of bad consequences.

See, if we want a life without God to live our own way, according to our own desires, then he gives us what he wants, what we want, rather. And so we can't blame God for what happens. After all, as I said, he's giving us what we want.

But our desires are so faulty that it simply leads to more sin and suffering. For example, we ignore God who says, be content, and instead follow our desire to be greedy. And so that leads, and so he gives us over to that desire, and that in turn leads to fighting, from children hogging toys and being greedy with toys, to countries wanting all the oil or land or whatever it is.

And so wars happen. Or we ignore God who says to have mercy and forgive, and instead follow our own desire to hate and envy and resent, which in turn leads to bitterness and revenge.

[17 : 59] You see, being handed over to our sinful desires is not a good thing. It simply leads to more sin and suffering. And when we see people living in the world according to their sinful desires, and causing suffering in the world, what we are seeing is God's anger being revealed.

That's what we are seeing. We are seeing part of his judgment. Oh, sure, following our sinful desires might be pleasing for a while, but in the end, it will cause us and others pain.

And ultimately, it will result in death and final judgment. See 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 there's a sense in which all people know that God ought to punish bad people. People seem to know that, yet they in turn do bad things, wrong things, and even approve of others who do the same.

Now this is a rather bleak passage, really, a bleak picture of humanity that Paul gives us here, isn't it? But it's also painfully familiar. As I said at the start, you only have to turn on the news or look around to see the humanity Paul spoke of almost 2,000 years ago is still the same today.

[19 : 22] People are still boastful, children are still disobedient, people still gossip and slander and murder and invent evil. I mean, just look at the internet and how people have used that to invent more evil.

This is the world we live in and it's because we have rejected God as God and so he's rightly revealing his anger upon us. But, here's point three, he's also revealed his anger upon himself.

As many of you know, God also gave over his son, not to his son's sinful desires because Jesus didn't have any, but he gave over his son to sinful men to be crucified by them.

And at the cross of Jesus, God the Son willingly took God's anger at our sin upon himself so that we might be forgiven and given the righteousness we so desperately need.

You see, there's a very important word right at the start of our passage at verse 18 that actually the NIV has left out. It's the word for or because that should be right after the number 18.

[20 : 27] And it's an important word because it joins verse 18 with the verses beforehand which I've included in your inserts. See, what did Paul write in verse 16? He says, I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes first to the Jew then to the Gentile.

For, in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed. A righteousness that is by faith from first to last just as it's written. The righteous will live by faith. Why do we need this righteousness?

Well, verse 18, because or for the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and literally unrighteousness of people.

You see Paul's logic? He's not ashamed of the gospel because it's through the gospel that God saves us and gives us that righteousness that we so desperately lack but need.

That's the logic. And in fact, from 118, roll the way through to chapter 3, verse 20, Paul will hammer home how much we need this righteousness with God, how much we need to be made right with him.

[21 : 32] But in the gospel, as we'll hear, God takes that anger upon himself in Jesus so that we can be made right with him. Jesus dies that death that we deserve, verse 32, so that we can be saved from it.

And if you're here this morning and you see perhaps yourself in some of these verses, perhaps, you know, sometimes you are given to gossiping or slandering, perhaps you have not acknowledged God as your God, then the good news is that you can be forgiven and made right with God by turning to Jesus and believing in him.

For it is by believing that Jesus died to take God's anger that God says, you believe in him, you're right with me. That's it. Have you done that? Do you believe in Jesus?

And if you have, then are we doing two other things in response? First, are we doing what we can to share this gospel? You know, praying for opportunities to share the gospel and supporting missionaries and events which proclaim that gospel.

You see, God's wrath is already being revealed, verse 18. And so we need a solution that deals with his wrath, not a solution that deals with greed and murder and violence and so on.

[22 : 51] We need to curb those things and protect those people as well, don't mishear me. But we need a solution that deals with the root of the problem. The root of the problem is people's rejection of God and therefore God's wrath against them.

And only the gospel deals with that problem. Last year, I went to a clergy conference and the former treasurer of Australia, Peter Costello, was there and he gave a dress on one of the nights there and he said this, I'm going from memory but I'm pretty sure it's pretty close.

He said, after a decade of being government and like a typical politician, he kind of talked about how good they were, after a decade of being government, we worked out that all we could do to solve the problems in Australia was to tax and spend.

Tax people and spend money on programs to help. But they were only ever band-aid solutions. And then he looked at us and said, but you have the gospel.

That's the real solution, so keep sharing it. That's the best thing I heard all conference. We have the gospel. Are we doing what we can with the gifts and opportunities that God has given us to share that gospel?

[24 : 06] Are we praying for opportunities? It's only the gospel that deals with the real problem. And second, in response to being saved by Jesus, are we continuing to worship God as God and give him thanks?

Are we seeking to serve him, our creator, as we were created to do? Is he God in our lives or are there idols creeping in? Family, sport, body, brains, bucks, or something beginning with the letter I?

I was greatly encouraged earlier this year actually when a new Christian, the man became a Christian at the end of last year and his family's been coming here for a little while.

They just got back from holidays at 3.30. They'd been driving all day. They arrived home at 3.30 with the caravan, rather tired, but instead of unpacking the caravan and relaxing and getting ready for the week ahead, they washed their faces and hightailed it up here to church to make it to the 4pm service to listen, to the Bible being taught and to meet with God's people.

Why? Because God is God in their family, not comfort, not relaxation. Here is a family, the father a new Christian and they were worshipping God as God in their lives and serving him even above themselves.

[25 : 26] Well, let me wrap up. No one likes talking about God's anger or wrath at our sin, but we need to remember it. So that we might continue to serve God with sincere thanks, knowing he has done something about it in Jesus.

You see, to truly appreciate how good the good news about Jesus is, we need to remember how bad the bad news of God's anger was for us, that we might be moved to thankfully and rightly serve him.

Let's pray. love it in our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for the gospel of Jesus, which gives us credits to our account, a right standing with you, even though we don't deserve it.

Father, we pray this morning seeing how angry you are at sin because it hurts people and yourself. We pray that you would help us to take sin seriously and seek to serve you with our whole lives, ever remembering what you have saved us from and so ever being thankful to you, our great God and Redeemer. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen.