

When in Rome: Considering God's Wrath

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[0:00] Welcome here for this Sunday, May the 3rd, and so I'm going to say it now. As you go into your week tomorrow, may the 4th be with you.

And I've said that to pastor friends who are also Star Wars fans like I am, and they've said, and with your spirit, and I'm just like, ah, maybe not. There you go. My name is Kent Dixon. It is my joy to be the pastor here.

We're continuing in our sermon series, When in Rome, as we make our way through the book of Romans, we're continuing to follow the words of Paul. We're uncovering some of the timeless truths that this book holds that are as true and relevant today as they were when Paul first wrote them, or when his scribe first wrote them.

It's interesting when some of my friends and family members learned that I was planning to walk through the book of Romans in a sermon series. It prompted them, some of them, to reread the book for themselves again.

And almost unanimously, the message back to me was, wow, way to go, followed closely by, better you than me.

[1:16] Interesting, right? There are hard words and tough messages in Romans, but we will walk through them together. The last thing I can or will do is skip challenging sections of Scripture for the sake of not making anyone feel somehow too guilty?

Too convicted? I don't know if you know this or not, but it's pretty clear in Scripture that people who are called by God to lead others, to serve as pastors and teachers and things like that for the kingdom, potentially have harder conversations to come than anyone else.

I can't remember if I've told this story before or not, but I remember being pretty anxious in a seminary class, and I went to my prof and he said, what's up?

And I said, I am terrified. And he said, of what? And I said, of leading people astray, of giving the wrong message, of implying something that isn't true and isn't God's will and isn't God's words for his people.

And he said, the fact that you're even thinking that way, my friend, you have nothing to worry about. So that's my goal, to never lead you astray.

[2:37] So if you're feeling led astray, please let me know. But I'm never going to, I've heard too many stories of pastors who have dodged addressing hard words from Scripture.

They wanted to deliver a tidy message, a pleasant sermon that would keep people coming back. And I don't believe that's the calling. Now, certainly, I don't want to turn everybody off so much that I'm preaching to myself.

But that's the reality, right? Is that God's word is not always easy. And so it's not always going to be easy for me to share or for you to hear, but we're committed to it.

So our passage for this morning is Romans 1, 18 to 32. So you can turn to that. Romans 1, 18 to 32, which says, The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

[4:03] 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 a mortal human being, birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things, rather than the creator, who has forever praised.

Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the 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. Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.

[5 : 27] They 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.

They have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. 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.

Hard words in many ways. Now, if you're afraid that I'm going to dig deep into something really awkward and uncomfortable, or pass judgment in some way against a very small minority group, you're going to be disappointed, because that's not where I'm going.

Now, I did also say to the men's breakfast fellas yesterday, I'm super glad that I'm preaching about this topic today, and not next Sunday, which is Mother's Day.

[6 : 40] So, God is good all the time. God is good. So, are those hard or confusing words for us to hear?

I believe that all too often, as followers of God, we extract what we want to hear from Scripture. Is that fair? We minimize or discard some of the more difficult concepts, which are no less the Word of God.

So, is the picture that you have of God as a loving Father who only wants what's best for you? Is your picture of God one that is a God who will answer every prayer, everything you ask of Him?

That He will forgive all your sins, no matter what they are? Friends, those things are true. Now, of course, God will not answer every prayer, those that are prayed according to His will.

But have you ever thought about another very prominent characteristic of God that we see throughout Scripture? Now, if you looked at the newsletter, you know where I'm going. It's one that we may tend to minimize or ignore altogether, though, because I think it makes people uncomfortable.

[7 : 57] Honestly, I don't ever recall, I thought about this a lot this week, I don't ever recall hearing a preacher speak about this topic in my entire life.

It doesn't make me a hero. It just makes me realize I'm facing something challenging. Our sermon this morning is titled, Considering God's Wrath.

And we're going to explore what the Apostle Paul has to say about the wrath of God in the book of Romans, and then also how that applies to us.

Wrath. Feels like a really apocalyptic word, does it not? It feels like obliteration. It feels like no mercy.

Like something that we've only seen God maybe unleash a few times that we can recognize in Scripture. Like on Sodom and Gomorrah, when He flooded the earth during Noah's time.

[8 : 57] Or that Scripture tells us we will all face when Christ returns. So I did some digging. He knew I would. The word wrath is defined as the emotional response to perceived wrong and injustice.

It's often translated as purely anger, indignation, vexation. Is anybody feeling vexed lately? That's not a word we use very often. Or irritation, right?

But I think it's far more than many of those English words can grasp. God's wrath. Both humans and God experience wrath, experience anger, fury.

But there's a vast difference, this is important for us to know, between the wrath of God and the wrath of human beings.

Why? How? Well, God's wrath is holy and always justified. Man's wrath? Been driving in traffic lately or construction traffic?

[10:10] Man's wrath or irritation or anger is never holy, and it's rarely justified. Human wrath often, in my mind, looks like revenge or evening the score, right?

I will get you for that, right? Is the idea of human wrath in lots of cases. And the Bible has a lot to say about it, not surprisingly.

Suggesting that God's wrath relates to a specific event of judgment that all people will face in the future, right? That's what we understand to be the wrath of God.

So as we sang this morning, the wrath of God would be satisfied through the crucifixion, the death and resurrection of Christ. There was no other penalty that could be paid besides that to even the balance sheet.

So when God's righteous judgment will come, as one source I read put it, his holy, justified, and measured response to sin, this is God's wrath, his measured response to sin and injustice and evil, aimed at protecting his holiness and restoring his purpose.

[11:32] It's not anger for anger's sake. And God's wrath is directed at evil. It's not directed at you personally or me personally.

And it is always intended to restore, not to destroy, not to condemn, as we might understand the concept of wrath to be. That is not the wrath of God.

That's not what it means, what scripture shows us. And the scriptures also speak of how God's wrath has already come in many ways.

We've heard this morning that God's wrath has been revealed, right? Paul says, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Paul speaks in our passage this morning about God's wrath having been revealed as well.

Almost as if we've been given a glimpse or a taste of it somehow, a taste of what that final judgment is going to be like when Christ returns. So why does God give us a glimpse of his wrath?

[12:36] Why does he give us a peek behind the curtain? How does God show his righteous anger seemingly long before the day of judgment, right?

It is not confined only to the last days. So our passage for this morning sheds a lot of light on this for us. Let's dig in and take a closer look together.

God reveals his wrath because, as we've heard, humanity suppresses God's revealed truth. What does that mean?

Paul talks about how, despite God revealing his truth to humanity, we suppress it. Humanity suppresses it. And we turn away from it by being unrighteous.

We reject revealed truth, God's own revealed truth. And we make selfish and sinful choices instead. And even worse than that, human beings not only ignore or reject God's truth, but we also have a habit of mocking it, right?

[13:44] You hear it all the time. People use the Lord's name in vain because they don't recognize him. They may see inherent value in using those words, but there is no relationship or connection there of any kind.

People even mock God himself, and that's an example of that. Human beings, I think, ignore the fact that qualities in us, like our intelligence, our personalities, those things strongly suggest an intelligent creator who made us.

We're not an accident. Do you know the astronomically low chances of all of us being an accident? Maybe someone was an oops, but not an accident.

Psalms 19, verses 1 and 2 says, The qualities and characteristics of God aren't only on display in us, in humanity, but in all of creation.

Scripture says that if we're silent, it doesn't really matter because the rocks, the very rocks will cry out to the glory of God. The design and order of our universe imply an intelligent design, and we can have long conversations about that.

[15:21] An intelligent design with an eternal creator behind all of it. We can see that, I think, when humanity chooses to selfishly ignore the evidence behind the beauty and design of the universe.

You've heard me say many times, where God restores my spirit and recharges my batteries is in creation, in the mountains, at the ocean. So I see the power of God at work and on display, and it just really recharges me.

So many things behind the beauty and design of creation just clearly state God exists. It's just that simple.

And when people turn their backs on that, ignore it, mock it, reject it, God is angered by that. God also reveals his wrath because humanity is ungrateful and foolish.

Do you hear that and say, ouch? I'm not ungrateful. I'm not foolish. I can be. In Romans 1, 21, Paul says, Friends, I think it's a really big deal when we're not thankful, when we're not grateful to God.

[16:52] To Paul's point here, we believe in God, right? Not a rhetorical question, necessarily. We believe in God. Otherwise, we probably wouldn't be here this morning.

We believe, I hope, that all that we are, as I prayed this morning, all that we are, all that we have, comes from him, right? Then we must be grateful to him. We must be thankful for what he has done, what he has given us, praising him and giving him all the glory.

To God be the glory. See the end result, though, there, Paul shares of not being thankful to God. Paul mentions it. People became futile in their thoughts and foolish in their hearts.

It's the consequence of not glorifying, following, or trusting God. And what a slippery slope starts to happen then.

Human beings are quick to start worshiping and glorifying things, or creations, instead of the creator. It may not seem as serious as creating a golden calf to worship, but it's really not that different.

[18:07] It is still idolatry. And contemporary humans have their own kinds of idols. Worshiping ourselves. Worshiping our own accomplishments.

Worshiping or coveting possessions or money. Turning our attention to social media influencers rather than other sources of truth. Friends, when we as created human beings stop being thankful to God and prioritize created things over him, God becomes angry.

And we can definitely recognize God's wrath at the end will come in clear and swift judgment. That's a new slide.

It is a new slide. So we can recognize God's wrath coming at the end. 2 Peter 3, verse 10 says, But the day of the Lord will come like a what?

Thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar. The elements will be destroyed by fire. And the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

[19:22] In case you've ever thought, how will I know when Jesus has returned? Boom. It won't be a shock. It will not be a shock, I promise you.

Oh, it will be a shock. But not in the way we're thinking, right? We will not be sitting around going, is Jesus coming back? I think he's coming soon-ish. I don't really know.

We tend to look at our spiritual watches and think we know. You'll know. 2 Thessalonians 1, 7-9 says, This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.

Not a surprise, right? He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.

Not a Mother's Day message. God's wrath being revealed today is more subtle. And that's what we're going to look at now.

[20:34] But at the same time, it is both recognizable and also terrible in many ways. God's wrath is God's wrath. So we come to a concept that I've often struggled with.

These words. God, the idea of God giving man or humanity up or over to sin. Have you ever struggled with that idea?

Fear not. I did some research, as I do, and of the most popular English versions in use today, English translations, translations.

Only the NIV, the New International Version, and the NASB, the New American Standard Bible, use the phrase, God gave them over, he says.

It says in those translations. And most modern Bible versions, the ESV, the New King James, say God gave them up. So the Greek word translated gave over or gave up in those, translated from Greek into English for those English translations.

[21:43] It actually means surrendered, yielded up, entrusted, or transmitted. So this is something I've wrestled with and I came to the conclusion that, oh, this is what, I think this is what it was sticking in my mind and bothering me.

And so here's some clarification. This isn't to suggest that God gave up on people. Right? Don't hear God gave up on people or that he stopped caring about them in any way.

In this context, it refers to the act of God completely abandoning the unrighteous. That's what Paul says. So as the wicked deserted God, God in turn deserted them.

You made your choice. I'm allowing you to make that choice. So God no longer gives divine direction or restraint when people choose other than him.

He allows them to corrupt themselves as they wished in the first place. Does that make sense? So because people would not honor God, he let them do what they pleased, ultimately, to dishonor themselves.

[23 : 04] It's free will on display here. Now, I have Calvinist theologian friends who would say, yeah, that's, I'm an Arminian. I can explain it one day, but it ultimately says that God is in control of all things, Arminianism, and if you're Baptist, you're essentially that.

So it's saying that God is in control, but we still have free will. Now, this will blow your mind. Do we ultimately have free will if God knows all the decisions infinitely that anyone will ever make?

That's a God perspective, remember? So from our perspective, yes, we have absolute freedom to choose whatever we want. Not all roads lead to glory.

So being given over to or yielded up to someone's sinful desires, it's a judgment from God. Can you recognize that?

It's basically God is saying, you choose other than me, go after it. Go for it. And we'll see how that goes for you. So what does this form of judgment look like?

[24 : 13] Well, he gives them up, the passage says, to sinful desires and shameful lusts. And as I said, I'm not going to drill down into certain varieties of sin, right?

The sin field is level. Playing field is level. I'm not going to get into one is worse than another. And this isn't some kind of fire from heaven scenario.

It's not like a raining down or a flooding the earth or something like that. But simply God leaving humanity to their own desires, as we've touched on, to indulging their own lusts.

And perhaps you've noticed over the years that a world without a godly focus, we see it today, doesn't tend to err on the side of loving thy neighbor much, does it?

As long as there's sinful human greed and selfishness, the world will be a challenging place. Mark 7, 21 to 23 says, For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come.

[25 : 27] Sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly.

All of these evils come from inside, Mark says, and defile a person. Humanity left to its own devices is capable of some truly dark and terrible things.

I have two friends, well, I have more than two, but I have two friends that I'm going to talk about in this brief story. One, a retired RCMP homicide detective.

Another, an Edmonton City Police detective, homicide as well. I attended the same church as them.

And so I'm fascinated by criminology, what makes someone make that choice versus that choice.

And so I was talking to them after a service once, and I said, how do you do it? How do you not drown in evil? Both Christians, right?

[26 : 39] And I said, I can't imagine what you've seen. And they said, they looked at each other and looked back at me and said, you really can't. And one of them said, imagine the most violent thing you've ever seen in a movie on TV.

And I said, yep, got it. And they said, it's far worse than that. That's the depth of evil that we're capable of.

Paul also speaks of sexual depravity. He talks about immorality that human beings can delight in, right? We wallow in sin if we're given the opportunity.

And particularly in the absence of God, when we do not have a relationship with God, when we do not accept what Christ has done for us, it's a very slippery slope indeed.

Oh, but come on, isn't that just actually amazing free will, right? We can do whatever we want. the ability to do whatever we want, whenever we want, with whomever we want, doesn't that sound amazing?

[27 : 51] To me, that sounds more like a life cranked right up to full volume, with no guardrails, a life that ultimately leads to pain and loneliness, and maybe even an untimely end.

We have been created with intention and love and care to worship and be in relationship with our creator.

Anything less will always wind up feeling both empty and unsatisfying. Paul also notes for us how in actively turning away from God and rejecting God, God gave them over, he says, to their depraved minds, to their own depraved minds.

And as we've considered, humanity without guardrails often descends into self-inflicted darkness. Satan has a role in it too, by the way.

Romans 1 verses 29 and 31 towards the end of our passage for this morning. Paul gives an account of the kind of behavior and indulgence that comes apart from God. He says, they have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity.

[29 : 16] 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. They have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. There are no admirable qualities in there.

I hope you agree. Sadly, even the most committed followers of Jesus are still subject to the kinds of sinful tendencies that Paul talks about in that list.

as I read them, as you think about them, as you've read them yourself this morning, maybe you're even thinking, ooh, that stings, or that's a sore spot for me, or that's, but God's grace is sufficient.

If you recognize things that you need to confess, do it. Paul says in Romans 1, verse 32, so at the very, very end of the passage, although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things, the nasty list, deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things, but also approve of those who practice them.

[30 : 38] I think we can see that in our world, can't we? So that may not be something I want to do, but it's their right to do it. It's not your place to judge somebody.

They can do whatever they want. I choose not to do that particular thing, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't celebrate those people who want to, or celebrate the actions of someone else being independent.

So Paul points out there that even though people may inherently know what they're doing is wrong, they do it anyway. Does that happen to you?

Start doing something, start getting tied up in something, and you think to yourself, oh, this is really a point of weakness for me, I really shouldn't, but no one's going to know, I can pray about it after, right?

All those things. Or even worse, we don't recognize it as being sinful. God's wrath is revealed today in the way that he's allowing humanity to go its own way.

[31 : 46] People follow the desires of their own hearts. They follow their own passions, their own lusts. We live in an instant gratification world.

In Ephesians 4, 17-19, Paul gives some good instruction that can apply to us today in light of all that we've considered this morning. Ephesians 4, 17-19.

So I tell you this, Paul says, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do in the futility of their thinking.

They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity and they are full of greed.

[32 : 48] Friends, God's mercy is manifested today for those who are willing to turn back to him. It's never too late. People who are willing to acknowledge God's revelation on full display in creation, even more in the sacrifice of his son Jesus.

People who are willing to be thankful to him, both through a general and constant attitude of gratitude, you've heard me use that term of phrase before, and by demonstrating that gratitude in and through repentance.

Are we thankful? Do we show it by turning away from our sins and towards God? God? If not, we have every reason to fear the wrath of God, not just on the day of judgment, but through the consequences in this life.

Consequences of God simply giving us up to our own desires. Even as followers of Christ, we can likely all recognize things that we do all too often that are based on our own sinful desires in the end.

That's why we need a Savior. And thanks be to God for his amazing grace. Amen.