

Living With an Angry God

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[0 : 00] Read for us. Read for us.

Read for us.

Read for us. Read for us. Read for us. Read for us. Read for us. Read for us.

Read for us. Read for us.

Read for us. Read for us. Read for us. Read for us. Jonathan, thank you very much for that reading.

[2 : 28] It's not very cheerful, is it? Read for us. Read for us. Read for us. Read for us.

Read for us. Read for us. Read for us. at the front here and some pens. Anybody want one? If you haven't got one, you can stick up your hand and Kirstie will pass one to you. And if there are any questions about this morning's talk or indeed any of our talks through Romans, then I'd be delighted if you would come and chat about it afterwards. This is a very difficult section in this book.

So, one I'd like to be able to say, well, let's just jump to something else, but we continue through with it and we'll see what God has to say. So we're going to pray and we're going to ask for his help as we look at this together. Our Father God, we do thank you for your word.

We thank you for all that it contains. But we do recognise that when we read through your word, there are some parts that are really quite difficult. It's hard to take in. And therefore we ask for your help to understand it and how this applies to our life and to society today. May we first allow it to challenge us and shape us before we begin to think of applying it to other people. So we pray for us all as we look at your word in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, what I am about to say to you, you may find very shocking. And it's this. God is angry.

[4 : 27] In fact, God is very angry. And if we are observant enough, there are signs of his anger all around us, even in our own lives. What do you say? You can't say that. What kind of Bible are you reading? The God that I know is a God of love. He's a kind and he's a compassionate God.

He doesn't get mad and he doesn't get annoyed. He's a caring and gentle God. How on earth could you say that God is angry? Well, look at verse 18. The wrath, that's the anger, the anger of God is being revealed. In other words, God's anger is present among us. When we were away on holiday, we went to visit Dachau. It was the first concentration camp built during the Second World War. In fact, it became the prototype, the model for every other concentration camp that the Nazis built. And as I stood there in this huge open courtyard, I tried to imagine what had happened. And as I thought, I felt sad and I was very upset. But I also felt very angry.

I was angry at those who had committed such awful crimes, many of whom had escaped prosecution. I was angry at those who had lived in the surrounding neighbourhood and had done nothing to prevent it.

Listen to this letter sent home by a Lieutenant Bill Cowling, an American soldier who was part of the liberation task force of the camp towards the end of the war. This is what he wrote home to his family.

As we approached the camp, the first thing we came to was a railroad track leading out of the camp with a lot of open box cars on it. As we crossed the tracks, we looked back into the cars and the most horrible sight I have ever seen met my eyes. The cars were loaded with dead bodies. Most of them were naked. All of them were skin and bones.

[7 : 01] Many of them had bullet holes in the back of their heads. It made us sick in our stomachs. And so mad we could do nothing but clench our fists.

You see, sometimes it is right to be angry. Anger can be a right response. In fact, to be unmoved at such terrible atrocities such as Dachau would be cold and hard-hearted. Anger is a sign that you do care. And that you are loving. And that you don't want these things to happen again.

Now the problem with my anger, and I suggest the problem with your anger too, is that it's uncontrolled. Our anger is temper-like. It can be an outburst that can be as terrible as the act to which you are angry at. In other words, your anger makes you as guilty as the person who committed the crime.

But when we look at God's anger, it is uncontrolled. It is fair. And it is his just response to sin. God is not hot-headed. He never loses it. He doesn't throw a hissy fit.

Rather, it is his personal hostility to evil and his act of involvement to punish sin. That's the definition of God's anger. His personal hostility to evil and his act of involvement to punish sin.

[8 : 49] So we need to ask the question, what is God angry at? Why is God angry? Well, look at verse 18 again. It says that the anger of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men.

God is angry at the atrocities that are being revealed from heaven against all the gods. God is angry at the murder and assault of that 12-year-old girl, Michaela Davis, in Dublin last week.

And he's also very angry at the atrocities that are being revealed from heaven against all the gods. God is angry at the atrocities that are being revealed from heaven against all the gods.

God is angry at the atrocities that are being revealed from heaven against all the gods. He's also angry at the atrocities that are being revealed from heaven against all the gods. God is not just angry with Hitler. He's also angry with me. With all of us. But there's a deeper reason behind all this wickedness as to why God is angry.

[10 : 51] And it's unpacked for us in these following verses. First of all, we've all rejected God. Look at verse 18, the end of verse 18. It says there that we have suppressed the truth by our wickedness.

Since what may be said. Since what may be known about God is plain to us. Because God has made it plain to us. You see, we've all been given knowledge about God. We may never have read our Bible or been given a Bible. We may never have been to church.

But the fact of God's existence surrounds us, everybody, every day. Look at verse 20. He says, That God exists.

I am here. In fact, when we look at the universe and see the way in which it holds together in such an orderly and harmonious way, reminds us that there is a creator.

Somebody is controlling this planet. And we're all dependent on our creator gods. There is too much. There is too much order for it just to be chanted.

[13 : 04] But what have we done with this knowledge? Well, we're told in verse 18, the end of verse 18, we have suppressed. We have pushed down the truth about God.

We have rejected God. We have ignored his advertising campaign and we pretend that he's not there. Verse 21. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him.

Now, I'm sure a few of you of children like us were always reminding our children to say thank you. Say thank you. Did you get something? Say thank you.

And not to say thank you is not just rude. It's ignoring the person who has given you something. It's blocking them out, isn't it, if you don't say thank you.

It's treating them as if they don't even exist. And that's what we've done with God. By not giving thanks to him continually for all that we have, we're rejecting him.

[14 : 08] We're saying, I don't need you, God. I'm quite self-sufficient. I can live life all on my own. We're blocking them out. So we have rejected God.

But it's not just rejection. The second thing is we have replaced God. Look at verse 22. For although we claim to be wise, we've become fools.

And exchange the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. You see, it's not just rejecting God.

There's a second step in the process. It's replacing God with something else altogether. It's our way of getting rid of God. For example, you know that I'm married to Kirsty.

Well, I hope you do. And that we belong to each other. Now imagine if I lived my life as if Kirsty wasn't there. Every day I was at home. Just ignored her.

[15 : 18] She probably thinks that anyway. Which isn't true. Pretends. That I never referred to her. Never talked to her. It would be awful.

It would be a terrible relationship. It would be a complete rejection of who she is. But imagine if I went and lived with somebody else. It's more than rejection, isn't it?

It's a completely removing and replacing Kirsty with somebody else. It's awful. And that's what we've done with God.

We've taken God out of the equation. We've not just ignored him. We've substituted him with something else. Verse 25.

It says there that we've exchanged the truth of God for a lie. And we have worshipped and served created things rather than our creator.

[16:18] Who is forever praised. Amen. Now in other cultures, images and idols can be very common.

And the people to whom Paul was writing within that culture, there was lots of temples with idols and images all around them. And if we were to go to somewhere like Thailand today, you would find all kinds of images there and statues.

Now just because we mightn't have a little carved out wooden idol in our house or some kind of shrine in our back garden where we have incense going and we put our vegetables at it and all this sort of thing, it doesn't mean to say that we don't have idols.

An idol, the Bible says, is anything that replaces God. Listen to this from Os Guinness. Os Guinness comes from the great dynasty of that family who created the black pint.

Some of them were brewers, others were missionaries and bankers. He came from the line of the missionaries. And this is what he says. When we cease to worship God, we do not worship nothing.

[17:34] We worship anything. We do not just eliminate God. We erect God's substitutes in his place. The biblical writers call these counterfeits idols.

An idol is something within creation that is inflated to function as a substitute for God. I'll read that again.

I think it's on the screen. An idol is something within creation that is inflated to function as a substitute for God. All sorts of things are potential idols.

An idol can be a physical object. It could be a property like your house. A person. An activity. A role. An institution. A hope.

An image. An idea. A pleasure. A hero. Anything that can substitute for God. Now can you see how we have all taken something within God's good creation and we've inflated it to function as a substitute for God.

[18:45] In other words, it becomes the very centre of our lives. And that's the only thing that we want. And if we haven't got it, our life falls apart. So we've not only rejected God, we have replaced God altogether.

Now the consequences of doing this are disastrous. And that's why God is angry. God's not just angry because he's treated as second best and he's sitting there in a bit of a huff thinking, oh they don't love me the same as other things.

That is part of it. But he's angry because when he is treated as second best, we destroy ourselves and each other and the world in which we live.

Now I'm not a scientist, but I know that the sun is at the centre of the universe. All the other planets, including Earth, they all are around the sun.

Now if one of those planets decided, hmm, I'd like to be at the centre of the universe and push the sun out, then the whole universe would collapse, it would break down.

[19:59] We would either melt or we would freeze to death. And that's exactly what happens when we replace God and put someone or something else in his place.

The whole moral order of the world breaks down. Instead of order, we have disorder. Instead of beauty, we find brokenness. And because we no longer have one God at the very centre, who we all must worship and obey, we've all got many gods, many idols, that we are pushing into the centre and they're all fighting for centre stage and the world falls apart.

Look at the downward spiral we have in these verses. It starts off by saying that although we knew God, verse 18, we suppress the truth. And from there, at the end of verse 21, it says our thinking becomes futile.

In other words, we have no category for deciding what is right or wrong any longer. What's right for you might be right for me. And our hearts become darkened.

That means we become desensitised to what's wrong. We become de-human. We don't behave the way we are meant to behave.

[21 : 21] And if we remove God out of the scene altogether, well then we are the ones who are left to make up all the rules about how life should be. And we decide what is right or wrong.

And we become the moral standard. And everybody has to do what we say. Frederick Nietzsche is a very famous atheist and philosopher.

And he wrote what was one of his most famous well-known works. It was called God is Dead. The main obstacle in life, he claimed, was that the person was the person who believed in God.

Those kind of people shouldn't be. Do you know who his most famous admirer was? A man called Adolf Hitler. From the philosophy of Nietzsche who said God is dead, came the living hell of places like Dachau.

Because if God is dead, if you replace God, you can do whatever you like. And so it is in our lives.

[22 : 31] Without God, we are accountable to no one. We can live and do as we like because we have all made up our own gods. And our own gods are never ever going to get angry with us.

They are only going to approve of what we do and tap us on the back and say, well done, good boy, good girl. Do whatever you like. Verse 32.

For 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.

God is angry because we've pushed them out. And when we push God out, the whole moral order breaks down. Then society turns in on itself.

So how, the next question, how is God's anger actually expressed? Well, remember what we said at the beginning.

[23 : 40] God's anger is not temper-like. He doesn't lose his cool. It is his controlled, personal hostility to evil and his active involvement to punish sin.

Now, three times in this passage we're told how we have behaved and three times we are told how God responds. So what have we done? Verse 23.

We're told that we have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images. We've put something else in place of God. How does God respond? Verse 24. Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful hearts of their, gave them over in their sinful desires of their hearts.

What have we done? Verse 25. We've exchanged the truth of God for a lie. And we serve other things instead of God. How does God respond?

Verse 26. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. lusts. Third, what have we done? Verse 28.

[24 : 47] Furthermore, since we did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, how does he respond? He gave them over to a depraved mind to do what they ought not to do.

Now, this act of giving over, it's repeated three times in those verses, is God's act of judgment against our sin. You see, in a perfect world, God is at the very centre.

And God, and our desire is for God and we want to worship God and obey God. But when we replace God, we have desires for other things and other people and we worship and we serve something else.

So when we reject God, he gives us over to those desires. He lets those desires control us and consume us.

He takes away his hand of restraint and he purposefully allows those desires to destroy us and to break us. It's as if God is saying, if this is how you want to live, if you want to live in a world where you don't have me and you want to be your own boss, I'm not just going to let you do it.

[26 : 06] I'm going to give you over to it. I'm going to push you into that kind of lifestyle. It's not just cause and effect whereby we do something wrong and this happens.

It's an act of involvement on God's part. He says, I give you over to it. And we see this being worked out in three ways.

Now I had great difficulty working through this because it's very hard. But I want you just to stay with me on this and to follow right to the end of this section to see how it all fits together.

There's three ways in which God gives us over to these over desires in our lives that cause all kinds of problems. Firstly, sexual impurity.

Verse 24. It says there, therefore God gave them over in their sinful hearts, sinful desires of their hearts, to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

[27 : 06] Now for whatever people may say, a string of one-night stands and affairs, indulging in pornography, demanding sex from your wife, is not a sign of sexual freedom, it's a sign of God's anger.

Doing what you want with who you want, well it might bring pleasure for a moment, but it ultimately destroys us and breaks us.

It's hurtful. It kills trust between people and it degrades people. It's God's act of judgment against us.

It's not freedom. It's a judgment. Second, we see it expressed in shameful lusts. That's the phrase in verse 26.

Let's read that. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another.

[28 : 15] Men committed indecent acts with other men. Now, same-sex relationships, and we hear a lot about this in the news and in the media, are not a sign that we have finally grown up and matured as a nation.

It is a sign of God's anger. The practice of lesbianism, of homosexuality, it's not natural. It is a denial of what we were created to be and what is actually best for us.

It breaks God's good order and his design for us. The family unit was to be a man and a woman together with children if God should bless them with children. So living outside of that is not a sign of maturity.

It's not a sign that we've grown up. It's actually a sign of God's judgment against us. That's really hard, isn't it? But there's another section.

It talks about being given over to a depraved mind. judgment. Now before we jump to wrong conclusions and think that sexual sin is the only way that God displays his judgment, look at verse 28.

[29 : 38] Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind to do what not ought to be done. You see, some of us reading through this passage here might be taking the moral high ground.

We can be sitting here thinking ourselves a little bit kind of superior and better than other people. And we're kind of thinking to ourselves, well, you know what, I'm not sexually impure.

I've never had an affair. I don't indulge in pornography. I'm not a homosexual. Therefore, God's not angry with me.

God's only angry with those kind of people. You know, that kind of lifestyle. He's only angry but with me. Not me. But look at verse 29.

He doesn't let anybody off the hook. It says, they have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice.

[30 : 48] They are gossips, slanderers, god-haters, insolent, arrogant, boastful. They invent ways of doing evil. They disobey their parents.

They are senseless, faceless, heartless, ruthless. Has anybody here ever disobeyed their parents? Has anybody here ever gossiped?

Has anybody ever suffered from envy? Do you see what he does through this passage? He places sexual impurity alongside gossiping.

God never grades one sin as more serious than other sins and neither should we. God is angry with us all because whether it's been sexual impurity or gossiping, whether it's been disobeying our parents or homosexuality, he puts it all in the same camp.

Every kind of moral disorder, every hint of brokenness in our lives, it's not just a sin. but it's God in his just anger giving us over to destructive behaviour because we have pushed him out.

[32 : 12] now if we stopped here it would leave us all feeling very down and quite depressed.

But as we were reminded last week, this is all about the gospel. And the gospel means good news. Well, where's the good news in all of this?

It doesn't sound very good news, it's pretty awful stuff. But the good news is that God has come to rescue us from his anger.

This big issue that we've been looking at, this is why the gospel has come, to rescue us from his anger, to deliver us from it. Look back at verse 17 of chapter 1.

It says therefore, in the gospel, in the good news, a righteousness from God is revealed. Why? Because, verse 18, and what you should write in there before, the, is the word for or because. [33 : 23] That's the right translation. So read verse 17, for in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed because, verse 18, the wrath of God is being revealed.

The gospel has come to us to rescue us because we are all under God's anger. And God in his love has come to do something about us.

It's telling us that God has provided a way for us who have replaced him to be right with him. He comes to deal with the problem of living under his anger.

And how does he do that? Well, let's have a little sneak preview. We will get to it in time, but chapter 5, verse 8. Chapter 5, verse 8.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

[34 : 36] You see, it's only when we look back to the cross where Jesus died. We have substituted God. But Jesus became the ultimate substitute for us.

He replaced us. He took all our ungodliness. He took all our wickedness on himself. So when Jesus suffered, when he died on the cross, he suffered the full blow of God's anger for us.

On the cross, Jesus was crushed beneath the weight of God's wrath. And when we look to Jesus and we see what happened there, we see God's personal hostility to evil and his active involvement to punish sin poured out on Jesus.

When Jesus died on the cross, he absorbed God's anger for us. And that's the good news.

That if we put our faith in Jesus, if we entrust our lives to him, we are given over into his family. We are released from his anger.

[35 : 49] We are treasured and cared for as his children. We are given his spirit to live a new and a different way. We are filled with joy and peace and we are satisfied and fulfilled and contented because we have everything in life from Christ.

We don't need to go searching for other things or to replace God because in Christ we have everything. And as we will go on to see, he transforms our lives so much that he gives us a new way to live.

Where we don't want to live as a depraved person or sexually impure. sinful lusts or shameful lusts. He will forgive it all and he will change our lives around so that we can live a brand new way under his design and under his order.

The way he intended life to be. God loves us so much that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

He came to rescue us from his anger. anger. And the truth that we all need to take home this morning before we start applying it to anybody else is we all need the gospel every single day because without it we are left open to the awful prospect of God's anger.

[37 : 18] Let's pray together. our father we have been working through something that has been really hard.

It's been difficult for us to take in and to try and get our heads around this. And so we keep praying that you will help us to work it into our lives.

Help us to see the seriousness of rejecting you and replacing you. Help us to see the ways in which each day we can replace God with someone or something.

Please help us to put Christ back at the very centre of our lives. That we would worship and serve and obey him and put everything else in its place.

And help us to always be so thankful for your amazing love for the Lord Jesus, for his death and dealing with God's anger for us so that we don't have to face it.

[38 : 43] In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we're going to sing our final song together.

Oh, see the dawn. if you could turn to the chorus for me Rob thank you very much this is what we've been summing up this morning this is the power of the cross that Christ became sin for us he took the blade he bore the