

God's Loving Anger

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[0 : 00] So let's return to Romans chapter 1. I'm going to read again at verse 18. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made.

So they are without excuse. For although they knew him, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Claiming to be wise, they became foolish and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

So a few weeks ago I did a funeral for somebody who had been attached to the congregation where I was ministered to in Fife.

[1 : 21] So for about 16 years I was a minister in Kirkcaldy in Fife, and there was a family who came along to the church from time to time. And the father of the family died about a month ago.

He was 52 years old. When he was 28 he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. And when he died, his daughter, who was really the only person in his family circle who had anything to do with him anymore, his daughter got in touch with me and said, would you take my dad's funeral?

So I went over to Kirkcaldy to do this funeral. And I have to say, by the end of the funeral, I was absolutely livid.

I was mad. I was so angry. And the reason was that this man's father showed up at the funeral.

And my friend hadn't seen his father for 12 years, despite having MS. And the last time he saw his father was in a bar in Glenrothes, when his father beat him to a pulp.

[2 : 45] As a 40-year-old disabled man, his own dad beat him up. And there he was at the funeral, large as life, pretending nothing was wrong. And everything inside me was raging at his cheek and his arrogance.

And when I thought about that, I thought, I'm right to be angry. Because what he did to his son was shocking. It was terrible. So we think, often we think, you know, it's okay for me to be angry.

But then when it comes to God, a lot of people would say, God can't be angry. That's not on. Lots of people today object to Christianity and to the God of the Bible.

And they'll say, I can't believe in the God of the Bible because I can't believe in a God of anger. That's grotesque and it's medieval.

This picture of a wrathful deity is the kind of anomaly that doesn't fit in the modern world. We're told there's no room for that kind of thinking in a progressive, modern situation.

[4 : 04] People think that to say that God gets angry is just a form of social control. Do what we tell you or God will get you.

So we've got this kind of curious anomaly then that it's okay for me to be angry. It's okay for you to be angry.

But it's not okay to talk about God's anger. What could God possibly have to be angry about? But here is Paul very clearly saying in Romans chapter 1 at verse 18, the wrath of God is being revealed.

So we're going to just take a little while now to think about what is God's anger like?

And why does God get angry? And then what do we do with that? So that's kind of three things we're going to think about. What's God's anger like? Because often we misunderstand God's anger.

[5 : 10] Why does God get angry? And then what should we do? What can we do in response? So what is God's anger like? In these verses Paul talks about the attributes of God, doesn't he?

His eternal power and his divine nature. Well, God's anger is not one of his attributes. Wrath is not an attribute of God.

But rather, it's an outworking of his justice. And because God is a just God, then his justice works itself out in his wrath.

The second thing to say when we're thinking about what is God's anger like is this, that God does not have emotions that are analogous to ours.

We can't look at our anger and then read out of our anger and think that that's what God's wrath is like. We are told that God has eyes and ears in the Bible.

[6 : 16] But this is the language of accommodation. It's simplified language in order to help us to begin to grasp some of the ideas and truths about God.

So when we're told that God has wrath or that God is angry, we don't read a direct parallel between that and our own experience of anger.

But we do know this, that God's anger is a necessary self-expression of his morality or his moral nature.

God and God's anger are a result of God's goodness. Because we have a God who cares about what's right and wrong.

So a few weeks ago, I went to see a film called The Darkest Hour. And it's about Winston Churchill and Dunkirk and Hitler.

[7 : 17] And that sort of period of World War II. And in the film, they make it really clear that Winston Churchill had a really deep, deep personal antipathy towards Hitler.

Winston Churchill wanted to destroy Hitler. And that was good. At that time, Britain needed a leader who was absolutely and utterly opposed to everything that Hitler stood for.

And who was willing to take a stand against it. We're glad that there was somebody who was angry enough at Hitler to want to crush him.

And so we should be glad that there is a God who is angry enough at evil to want to crush him.

And in God, we see anger towards us and our hard-heartedness. We see in Jesus, at the grave of Lazarus, anger towards death and all that it does to disfigure us and our lives and our world.

[8 : 37] So anger is an expression of God's goodness and his moral nature. And God's anger is visible. See, there's two things that Paul says are being revealed.

In verses 16 to 18, God's gospel has been revealed. The power of God has been revealed. A righteousness from God has been revealed.

Why do we need this righteousness from God? Because alongside that, God's anger, God's wrath has been revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

So his anger is visible. It's noticeable. His anger is being worked out in the moral fabric of the world we live in.

Evil has a destructive quality that impacts on everything around us. We're told in the early chapters of the Bible, in the book of Genesis, in chapter 3, of God's curse on sin and wrongdoing.

[9 : 41] And that curse, God's anger against sin, works its way out into the fabric of the world we live in, in our toil, in our weariness, in our frustration, in the brokenness of the world and in the pains of life.

God's anger works its way out in the everyday circumstances of ordinary people's lives. God's anger is an expression of his goodness.

And God's anger is good in itself. Because everything that God does is good. And we know that love permeates all that God is.

God's anger is only aroused by evil. God's anger is based on perfect knowledge. God's anger is utterly fair. He never gets it wrong.

He never misjudges a situation. And God's anger always has our good as its goal. God's anger is never mixed with anything bad.

[11 : 00] I came home from that funeral. And I drove home from Fife to Edinburgh in a really foul mood. And I got home.

And when I was home, I was still in a foul mood. I didn't have a cap. But if I did, I would have kicked it. You know, I wanted to get a plate and throw it against the wall and smash it.

I was furious in the inside. And my anger was mixed with all kinds of wrong feelings. All kinds of sort of sinful impulses.

I was furious with this man's father. That played out in lots of unfair ways. It made me angry with lots of other things and lots of other people.

It put me in a bad mood. Well, that's not what God's like. God is not in a bad mood. God is not in a bad mood. And God's anger is never misdirected. And it's never mixed with anything bad.

[12 : 04] And it's never unfair. In fact, God's anger is always mixed with kindness. And with mercy. And with compassion.

Because none of us have ever really had to face the fullness of God's anger. Whenever we experience the outworking of God's anger in our world and in our lives personally.

We always experience it in a way where it's mixed with kindness. And gentleness. And love. And compassion. And where it is directed towards our good.

Because God's anger is tied to God's love. It's because God loves everything that is good and beautiful. It's because God loves the things that are just and true.

That he is so opposed to that which is wrong. That which is evil. That which is broken. That which is dark.

[13 : 09] God is against that. Because he loves. And he loves us. And he loves you. Many of us have been hurt by anger.

In our lives. And many of us have experienced the wrong kind of anger. And many of us have experienced the wrong kind of anger.

Even from within the church. And from within the Christian community and from other Christians. And we're left wounded by that.

Because we express anger so badly. And for the wrong reasons. And so when I talk about the anger of God.

Some of you probably pull back a bit. And you find it a very, very hard idea to deal with. I had a friend who was dying recently. And when he got his terrible diagnosis.

[14 : 21] He was an atheist. I said to him. Do you want to sort of think about this spiritually? And talk about it with me. And he said no. He says because. I was brought up in such a.

With so much. He was brought up in the church. And he says I was brought up with so much anger. And I'm terrified to think about my day. Because all he ever knew of.

Was an angry, angry God. And in that anger there was no love. And no mercy. And no kindness. And so we make God's wrath seem like a terrible idea.

An objectionable idea. And sometimes that means that people put the two things against each other. You know. I like a God of love.

But I can't believe in a God who's angry. And so we put love and anger against each other. But try and understand this.

[15 : 22] That anger is not the opposite of love. I think it was Tim Keller in one of his books said. That the opposite of love is not anger.

It's indifference. You know. The person who doesn't love you. Is the person who just doesn't care. It doesn't matter what happens to you. They don't care. God's not like that.

God cares. His anger is not the opposite of his love. His anger is the expression of his love. He is concerned. He is concerned.

He is concerned. By all the harm that has been done. By us and to us. In a world of brokenness and sin.

And he's against that. And that's what his anger is. It's very important then for you and me.

[16 : 22] To have a true sense of God's anger. We're not allowed to misrepresent it. We're not allowed to use it as a way to control others.

But what we need to do is this. The Bible says make room for an angry God. Okay. So we don't want to scrub out the idea of an angry God either.

Make room for an angry God. Because that's what allows us to lay our imperfect anger to the side.

Our anger is so mixed. So unjustified a lot of the time. So unfair. And it comes out in our grumbling. In our frustration.

In our being annoyed with things. And anger expresses itself in so many small ways. In the everyday things of life. And we need to have our anger cured.

[17 : 23] And the only way that that can happen is by making room for God's anger. I don't need to seek revenge. I don't need to seek justice. I don't need to seek vengeance.

That's why I can leave it to God. I can set my own imperfect anger aside. And leave God to deal with things.

In his perfect and loving anger. So that's what God's anger is like. If you're an angry person. And most of us are. At some level.

Then you need to learn to set your anger aside. And if you live in an angry home. Or an angry environment.

And this is all kind of horrible for you to hear. I do want you to be assured. God's anger is not that kind of anger. Of a foul temper. Or of bitterness.

[18 : 24] Or harshness. It's always mixed. With goodness. And love. And kindness. So why is God angry?

Well. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven. Against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

So that's very clear isn't it? God's anger has been expressed against everything that is ungodly and wicked. Ungodliness is our inability or our refusal to love and worship God.

And wickedness is our refusal to love and serve other people. So this is sin and evil that's directed towards God.

And towards one another. It's our lack of love for God. And our lack of love for others. And that's what's wrecking the world we live in.

[19 : 31] And that's why God is angry with it. Because we're the ones who are wrecking the world. Why do we do this? Because we don't want to know God.

Paul goes on to say what can be known about God is very clear. But although we know God. Verse 21. We don't honour him as God. We don't give thanks to him. We suppress the truth that we know about God.

In our unrighteousness we suppress the truth about God. So we're opposed to God. We won't love God and we don't love others as we should. And we do so because we don't actually want to know God.

And we don't want to know God. Because really we want to be God. We want to be the one who's in absolute and total control of our own lives.

And if possible we want to be in absolute and total control of the lives of everybody else. Around them. So that the world will bend to our needs, our desires, our will.

[20 : 39] So God's saying there's something deeply faulty in us. Because we don't want to know him.

We want to be like him. As it says in Genesis 3. Now for a lot of people that you and I meet, that doesn't seem real. Maybe to you that doesn't seem real.

You, as most people do, you may think of yourself as just a good, kind, decent, altruistic person. And so we take a very superficial view of ourselves a lot of the time.

And we deceive ourselves. So that's why God has to reveal his anger. So we can see ourselves as we really are. What is God to be angry about? Surely God's got nothing to be angry about.

Look at what a great guy I am. But then God reveals his anger. We have to take a deeper look. So at the funeral of my friend Keith, his dad was there.

[21 : 45] Came up to speak to me after the funeral. And you would have thought the way he spoke about himself. That he was the most righteous, good, kind man.

He came to me deliberately and told me every good thing he could think of about himself. He was a man who hated his own son. But wanted me to believe that he was the best guy who'd ever walked on planet earth.

We flatter ourselves as human beings. In Psalm 36 it says the wicked flatter themselves too much to detect or hate their own sin.

That's true of me. I flatter myself continually. To kind of convince myself that I'm not as bad as I really am.

That I'm a nicer person than I really would think otherwise. You know, I always want to think the very best of me. And we all have that tendency within us.

- [22 : 52] But even our best actions are driven by a selfishness. Even the best things we do, it's often done so that we will seem good to others.
- Or because we want to give ourselves credit in our own eyes. You know, we just want to kind of play a game of pleasing others.
- Pleasing ourselves. And so, of course, it's important to do what is good. But don't let the good things you do deceive you into thinking that you're better than you are.
- Don't let it blind yourself to the deeper spiritual battles that are going on inside you. And especially don't let it blind you to your need of God's grace in your life. Because we don't want to know God, we suppress the knowledge of God.
- Which is seen, obviously, clearly, in the world around us. I'm not going to go into that. But Paul makes two arguments that are sometimes called the cosmological argument.
- [24 : 01] And the teleological argument. So the cosmological argument is, why is there a cosmos? Why does the world exist? Why have things been made?
- Because you can't get something from nothing. Okay. That's the cosmological argument. The teleological argument is, why does the world seem to be designed in a certain way?
- Why does the world work? It seems to have been put together by a great intelligence. Stephen Hawking recently passed away, of course.
- Hawking wrote this a long time ago. He said, the laws of science as we know them at present contain many fundamental numbers. Like the size of the electric charge of the electron. And the ratio of the masses of the proton and the electron.
- The remarkable fact is that the value of these numbers seems to have been very finely adjusted. To make possible the development of life. So that's an argument.
- [25 : 00] That there's design behind the world. Intelligence. It's an argument for God. God's signposts to a greater reality. And Paul says, we know these things.
- They're intuitive to us. They're innate to us. The existence of God is plain to us. We know them, but we reject them. We prefer lies over truth. We prefer darkness over light.
- And that is the root of our brokenness. We give ourselves to all the things that we love and desire other than God. That might be money, career, sex.
- Here he talks about the glory of the mortal God in verse 23. Exchanged for images resembling mortal man, birds, animals and reptiles. Those were the idols of the first century pagan world.
- But the 21st century modern world has its own idols. They're usually power and money and sex. The things that our contemporaries worship.
- [26 : 02] The things that perhaps we ourselves worship. We can't live without them. We have to have them. These are the false gods of our age.
- And we go after these things in preference to the true and living God. Because we want to be in control of our own lives.
- But what do these idols do? Well, we don't get control of our own lives. They take control of us. Instead of yielding our lives to God's good and gracious power.
- We yield our lives to powers that are dark and destructive. And that makes us less than we ought to be as human beings.
- All this rejection of God and his truth brings darkness and futility to our world. We bring folly instead of wisdom, Paul says.
- [27 : 03] Futility instead of hope. Dark motives instead of loving motives. We give up grace and glory. And we embrace sin.

And because of that, God's anger comes. And works its way into our world. And into our lives. And so you and I need to be saved from God's anger.

We need to find salvation through Jesus Christ. If we are not in Jesus.

So, you know, that's... I've tried to describe what's God's anger like. Then to describe why does God get angry. Finally, I just want to land on this.

What do we do? Where do we go? What's the response? Well, God wants us to move towards Jesus.

[28 : 04] To look to Jesus. If we choose not to do that, then we have a future where we will have to face God's wrath fully.

The Bible talks about a day of wrath to come. The day of justice. When we will have to face God's just judgment. Now, God's just judgment.

The final judgment of God is good news. God will bring all evil to an end. God will defeat all the powers of darkness. And lay them low.

That is good news in a world of suffering. So, God's day of judgment is good news for the world. But it can be very bad news for me. If I am not to be found in Jesus Christ.

If all the anger of God against sin is to be poured out on the day of wrath. And I am not to be found in Jesus on that day.

[29 : 09] Then I am going to have to face all the weight and guilt of my sin. Before God. I am going to have to deal with that all by myself.

Up until this moment. There is only one. Who has faced the full anger of God. You and I have never really experienced that.

In any way. The only one who has truly faced the full anger of God. Is Jesus. God in his son.

Takes his anger on himself. So that we can be spared. So, Paul will write later in the book of Romans in chapter 8. He did not spare his own son.

But gave him up for us all. He did not spare him. What does that mean? He did not spare him. Well, it means that he was handed over.

[30 : 12] He did not spare him. He gave him up. He handed him over. What did he hand Jesus over to? He handed him over to the cross. To his enemies.

To death. To forsakenness. To grief. He handed him over to bear all the weight of sin. He handed him over to be a propitiation.

Which means to bear the wrath of God. He did not spare him. It means he had to face it in all its fullness.

Nothing was mitigated. Nothing was held back. Only one then in all of history has fully faced God's anger. And that was God's son.

And God's son bore the anger of God on the cross. So that we don't have to. So that we can be set free.

[31 : 12] From all the penalty and the guilt of sin. So that we can be forgiven. So our sin goes on him. And God's wrath is poured on him.

So that it doesn't need to be poured out on us. Paul says that this is the righteousness from God. If we go back to verse 16. This is the righteousness of God.

And he says that in that righteousness. There is power. Okay. The gospel is not simply a message. It is not an idea.

It is not simply a truth. It is a power. There is power. There is power in this message. To rescue you. To change you.

To redeem you. And to renew you. And so as we think about the brokenness of the world.
As we think about the brokenness of our own lives.

[32 : 16] As we think about God's goodness and love. As we think about God's opposition. To all that is evil and wrong. In the midst of all of those great truths.

God stands and speaks to you and says come to Jesus. Run to Jesus. Trust in Jesus.
Live in Jesus.

There is no other way. And there is no other place. And so that's the gospel invitation.

That we rest all our hope. All our trust. All our faith. In Jesus Christ. That's a personal invitation.

And it's made. To sinful. Wrongdoing people. To the objects of God's wrath and anger.

[33 : 17] God says. Come. Come to me. Find your rest. In me.

So let's conclude. I'm just going to ask you to bow your head in prayer. And we'll sing our last psalm. Thank you.