

(2) Why God is right to judge

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[0 : 00] The letter of Paul to the Romans, starting in chapter 1, verse 16, page 1131 in the Church Bibles, starting in verse 16.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed, from faith, for faith, as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. For 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, in the things that have been made.

So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honour 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 fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

[1 : 31] Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves. Because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature. And the men likewise gave up natural relations with women, and were consumed with passion for one another.

Men committing shameless acts with men, and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind, to do what ought not to be done.

They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness.

They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

[2 : 47] Though they know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them, but give approval to those who practice them.

Amen. Thanks very much indeed for reading to us. Please do keep Romans open on page 1131, if you've closed it, as we continue this series that we started last week in Romans together.

But before we do that, why don't we pray, and ask for God's help as we look at the Bible together this morning. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, as we rejoice in the fact that you are the creator of the world, we praise you too that you speak to us, and that you haven't left it to our own devices to work out what you are like, and how to relate to you, and to make sense of our world.

And we pray therefore this morning, please as we look at your word, would you teach us, instruct us, change us, and shape us. And we ask it for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Now look, my aim this morning is to show why only those who trust in Jesus Christ, why only those who have faith in him, will be saved, and right with God, on the final judgment day.

[4 : 16] And the reason that is my aim is because that is God's aim for us as we look at these verses in Romans, Romans chapter 1, verses 18 to 32, together this morning.

Now I want to say right up front, that is a hard thing for us to hear. It's a hard thing, isn't it, for those of us to hear who are just looking in, as it were, on the Christian faith and the claims of Jesus Christ. Because of course, as soon as our culture hears that, then quick as a flash, we reply, but you're not saying, are you, that everyone else goes to hell.

Well, of course, those of us who are Christians find it equally hard. Many of us will know what it is to have been ashamed of the gospel. It can sound so intolerant that only those who put their trust in Jesus Christ can be saved.

It can sound so primitive. After all, what sort of God would give up his own son dying on a cross? And it can sound so irrelevant in a world where so often the pressing issues of the day are the environment or war or terrorism or whatever.

[5 : 38] It can seem a million miles away from those things. Well, if you were here last week, we saw that Romans begins with a conviction that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, never to die again, and therefore he is Lord of all people.

And because he is Lord of all people, the gospel, the good news about Jesus, is a message for all people. Indeed, it is only through faith in Jesus that we can be right with God.

Have a look at verses 16 and 17 of chapter 1. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. It is only possible to be right with God through the death of Jesus by believing that he died in our place.

And now when you look on to verse 18 and just see, you see how verse 18 begins. It begins with the word for, which shows us that this next section explains why it is only by believing in Jesus Christ and his death that we can be right with God.

[7 : 01] And it is because however well our lives seem to be going, none of us are by nature right with God. Indeed, all of us are by nature in the wrong with God.

And we will never see why Jesus had to die, why that is such good news, and why it's only those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ who are right with God until we have grasped the reality and the truth of that.

It won't be easy for us to hear, perhaps rather like going to your GP and although you feel fine and you look fine on the outside, nonetheless, your GP has some very bad news for you.

It is not easy to hear. But when your GP says that, it is not to scare us, it is to save us. We will only accept the treatment once we have grasped the severity and reality of the problem.

In the same way, you and I will only see the need to be put right with God when we have grasped that all of us are wrong with God. Well, there are three things to grasp from Romans chapter 1.

[8 : 17] I've put them there on the back of the service sheet on the outline. And first of all, God is angry. God is angry. Have a look with you at verse 18. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

Now, isn't that a very surprising thing that God is angry? Most people, I guess, think of God as a kind of warm, cuddly, loving, gentle, grandfatherly figure who smiles weakly at everyone.

The idea that God might possibly be angry is a million miles away, isn't it, from the way in which our culture thinks. However, we'll never understand God and we'll never understand the message of the Bible.

Indeed, we'll never understand our world until we have grasped the fact that God is angry. Now, we mustn't misunderstand God's wrath.

It's possible to think of God's anger in too human a way, which makes God sound vindictive. I had an English teacher at school who could fly off the handle at any moment.

[9 : 33] He'd get about two seconds warning as his face turned the colour of an overripe tomato and suddenly there was this just enormous explosion and it came from absolutely nowhere.

Well, God's anger is not a flying off the handle kind of anger. It's not arbitrary. It's not capricious. It's not vindictive. Rather, it is his settled, righteous response, his righteous anger to what he sees in his world.

But it's also possible to think of God's anger in too impersonal a way. So some people have suggested that God isn't really involved in what the Apostle Paul describes here as God's wrath.

That it's just a kind of inevitable process of cause and effect. It's just the way the world is, if you like. But now look again at verse 18.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven. God's wrath is personal. It is active. It is deliberate.

[10 : 45] Now of course for some that raises the question well, how can a God of love be angry? But of course God's anger is an expression of his love. The opposite of love isn't anger.

It is indifference. A God who doesn't care about his world. Though God's anger is born of his goodness. It is born of his love for his world.

God is angry. Now if you're here this morning and you are not yet trusting Jesus Christ, I realise this is not an easy subject and it is not something that you'll want to hear.

But like the visit to the doctor's surgery and like being told there is something seriously wrong, it is the bad news that will help us to grasp the good news.

Well for those of us who are right with God, who have put our trust in Jesus already, who are Christians, remember that God's Holy Spirit inspired Romans to be written so that we'd be shaped by the gospel.

[11 : 58] So that we'd be changed by it. So that we'd be transformed by it. And that will never happen until we have grasped the reality of God's anger.

Now the other surprise I think in verse 18, which you probably spotted, is that the wrath of God is being revealed in the present. Now just flick over to chapter 2 verse 5 where we see, and we'll see this next week, that there will be a future judgment day.

Chapter 2 verse 5, But because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

There will be a judgment day in the future, and you probably know that Jesus Christ spoke more than anyone else in the Bible of the reality of that day. Nonetheless, chapter 1 verse 18, God is angry now.

Well that of course begs the question, why? So secondly, because all people suppress the truth about God. Verses 18 to 23. Have a look with me, will you, at verses 18 to 20.

[13 : 15] for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

for what could 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 in the things that have been made.

So they are without excuse. The truth about God is plain to everyone. So we have no excuse for turning our backs on God.

That's why it's brilliant to have Psalm 19 read earlier on, the heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech and night to night reveals knowledge.

The creation itself, Romans chapter 1 verse 20, shows God's eternal power and his divine nature. In other words, it shows that he is eternal and that he is divine.

[14 : 33] He is God. Now the point is not that we can know everything about God from creation, but rather there is enough for everyone to know in their conscience, in their heart of hearts, that God is there.

There is no excuse, verse 20. It is as if God has stitched his existence and power and his creation into the very fabric of our minds such that they are instantly recognized when we look at his world, at his creation.

We can't see God, but we can see creation. It is the visible disclosure, if you like, of the invisible God. Now the funny thing is, of course, that even the way in which we talk about the creation shows that we believe in God.

So we say that on the one hand we are just naked apes, but then of course we are outraged when people behave like animals. We talk about right and wrong.

In fact, the new atheists Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens in particular talk about right and wrong. But the language of right and wrong is meaningless, isn't it? Unless there is a God who says what is right and what is wrong.

[15 : 58] Otherwise, it's simply my opinion about what is right against your opinion about what is right. right. Though for the atheist, their conscience is not on their side.

No one is an atheist. They simply close their minds to what they know to be true. I wonder if you remember the children's story of the princess and the pea.

I was reading it to our four-year-old a few weeks ago. How the princess was given a bed for the night and the bed was piled high with 20 mattresses and in order to test or prove whether she was a real princess, a pea was put underneath the bottom mattress and she had a wretched night's sleep despite these 20 mattresses piled high because she could feel this pea pushing in to her back and

she had no sleep at all.

Well, in just the same way we can come up with countless reasons for not believing in God but we still feel God digging into us however many excuses we pile up.

We know that he is there. And what do we do with that knowledge? Verse 18. We suppress it. And that is explained further in verse 21.

[17 : 25] For although they neither knew God sorry, let me start again. For although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him but they became foolish in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.

We refuse to give God his proper place in his world. This is the heart of what the Bible calls sin. It's a rejection of God as God failing to honour him as God failing to give thanks to him as God. The objections to God are not intellectual objections. It is that we don't want to honour God. It's that we don't want to give thanks to God.

In other words we don't want him to be God. It's the language I guess isn't it of the child who ignores his mother's demands to switch off the television and go to bed.

The child doesn't kind of rant and rave you're not my mother I won't do as you say. They're much more effective just to ignore its mother and just sits there and carries on watching telly.

[18 : 37] And notice we don't just reject God we worship other things instead. Verse 22 Claiming to be wise they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

In other words the existence of other faiths is not evidence that people are on a kind of spiritual journey towards God rather they are evidence of people's rejection of God.

And of course 21st century Britain has plenty of secular idols an idol is whatever you want the most isn't it? I wonder what you want the most perhaps success comfort lifestyle exam results pleasure job titles successful children there are plenty of idols that we chase after.

Just think of how much we give up to have these things. Just think of some of the sacrifices we make in order they might be ours. And will you notice that in verse 22 in a world which rejects God chasing after such idols will look wise.

You see it's why no one's up in arms about the fact that we reject God. It's why there isn't a national outcry in the media because it looks wise and everyone else is living the same way.

[20 : 09] But God sees it verse 21 as foolishness worshipping what is created rather than the creator.

Well there's an uncomfortable truth for modern sophisticated 21st century people. And you and I will never grasp why it is that only those who believe in Jesus Christ and trust in his death are right with God until we have grasped the reality for ourselves of what God is telling us in these verses.

There are no exceptions. These are not especially wicked people who are being described here.

They are all people who are being described. And you and I will not be transformed by the gospel.

We will not be shaped by the gospel until we have grasped it either. God is angry because people suppress the truth about him. Well, thirdly, and so God gives them up.

Now, we said, didn't we, back in verse 18, that although there will be a future judgment day, God's wrath is also being revealed now in the presence. And we see that very clearly in verses 24 to 32, where three times God tells us that he has given us up.

[21 : 40] I wonder if you saw that. Verse 24, have a look at it, therefore God gave them up. Verse 26, for this reason God gave them up.

Verse 28, and since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up. God gives us up. He hands us over to the consequences of our rejection of him.

You see, how do we see God's anger in the world today? In a sense, he does nothing. He simply removes his hands of restraint.

Five years ago, Hurricane Katrina struck the city of New Orleans. In the days that followed, you may remember, the city was abandoned by the police. Law and order simply broke down.

Here is one description I came across of what kind of place the city turned into. Armed gangs dealt drugs and fought turf wars.

[22 : 51] There are reports that children were raped and killed. Armed looters took pot shots at emergency services. Dead bodies lay where they had fallen. A city, we might say, given up to lawlessness.

The hand of restraint removed and people left to their own devices. Now that is in microcosm, a picture of our world, as God gives people up.

Would you notice in verses 24 and 25, it is seen in human sexuality. see. Now the apostle Paul is not hung up on sex. The Bible celebrates sex as God's good gift within heterosexual marriage. But of course, as soon as we remove God from the picture, as soon as we no longer see ourselves created in God's image, then it means it will change the way in which we see ourselves and our own bodies.

I'll no longer have a high view either of my body or of your body. I will simply think that my body is there for my pleasure and that your body is also there for my pleasure.

[24 : 13] And such an attitude to sex where God is removed from the picture degrades humanity more than anything else. And of course the consequences of that are clear for all to see.

you. And which of us, when we are frank with ourselves, would say that verse 24 doesn't describe us in some way?

The dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, lust of their hearts and impurity. And then verses 26 and 27 talk about homosexuality.

For this reason, God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature and the men likewise.

Because once we've exchanged the truth about God for a lie, it is inevitable that we'll exchange the way in which God has designed sex to be within heterosexual marriage, it's inevitable we exchange that for something else.

[25 : 22] And the point is not here that homosexuality is a worse sin than any other, because all sin does the same thing. It involves this exchange. It exchanges the way God has made the world for something else.

I take boasting, for example. I wouldn't dream, would I, of boasting of my own achievements if I really believed that God is God and that he is the one who has given me the ability to do things and to achieve things.

Let me say, if you are tempted in the area of homosexuality, as some of us will be, God is not more angry with you than with anyone else. You see, just look at this list here.

In verses 29 to 31, homosexual behavior is placed on a level with evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness, gossip, slander, hatred of God, insolence, pride, boastfulness, disobedience to parents, foolishness, faithlessness, heartlessness, and ruthlessness.

Now, that list speaks of disordered relationships and of the breakdown of human society. Not to turn us into finger-wagging Daily Mail readers who say, isn't the world a terrible place?

[26 : 52] Isn't it full of terrible people? No, but to convict us of the fact that we are by nature not right with God.

You and I are meant to look at this list and say, yes, I know that I am like this. Not necessarily in every detail, but in broad brush, yes, I know this describes me.

And perhaps the biggest surprise is verse 32, right at the end. Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them, but give approval to those who practice them.

The rejection of God so entrenched in people's lives that they all risk judgments which they know they deserve in order to carry on living how they want to live without having God in the picture. And not only that, but they encourage a change in values, notice, and public opinion, which makes sin normal and makes what is wrong right. They give approval to those who practice them.

[28 : 08] Again, doesn't that describe the society we live in? All in the name of freedom. And tolerance and individual rights. And doesn't it describe to our own hearts, just so we're not finger-wagging, as we encourage others to believe that my wrong behavior, my deceit perhaps, or my gossip, or my covetousness, is actually right behavior.

So easy, isn't it, to do that in conversation, to want others to encourage us in our line of thinking, well, actually, it is totally wrong. So you see, where do we look to see that God is angry?

All around us. The law courts, malice, envy, greed, the marks of a society under God's wrath.

The office, strife, gossip, slander, boastfulness, the home, disobedience to parents, insolence, pride, the shops, envy, covetousness, the television chat shows, the newspapers, the internet, our own hearts.

It is a foretaste of hell. It is a foretaste of hell as God leaves us to our own desires. Why is it that only those who believe in Jesus Christ are right with God?

[29 : 51] Very simply because without him, all of us are in the wrong with God. Now, maybe you're here this morning and you are offended by what you have heard.

You are offended by the exclusive claims of Christianity. It's very countercultural, isn't it? Our culture loves to believe that people are good and will get to heaven by whatever path they choose. Maybe you're a Christian, but if the truth be known, you're ashamed of the gospel and often embarrassed by the gospel. Which of us hasn't felt ashamed?

Which of us hasn't felt embarrassed? Perhaps like the little girl who grew up embarrassed by her mother's hands. She was ashamed of them.

They were scarred, they were raw. She hated even being touched by those hands. Until one day she asked why.

[30 : 57] And her mother explained how when she had been a baby there had been a fire in the house and how her mother had rescued her and how those hands were now scarred for life.

And the little girl took those hands and she kissed them. You see, it is only when we grasp that God is angry with each one of us.

that we will understand that the gospel, the message of Jesus Christ, that Jesus died so we can be right with him, is not something to be offended by.

It's not something to be ashamed of. No, it is the most wonderful, the most beautiful thing in the world. I'm going to suggest we have a few moments of quiet and time to meditate on what we've heard from God this morning and time to pray on our own and then in a while Mark will come and lead us together in confession.

and thank you.

[32 : 26] ■■