

# Lent: Week 3

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Preacher: Fr. Caleb Evans

[0:00] For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit. Amen.

So this morning's passage from Romans chapter 1 is a challenging piece of scripture, isn't it? One of the challenges that it presents is that first of all, it's unfamiliar to some people because some churches avoid the reading of this passage in public worship.

Another challenge is that there can be a tendency for people to miss the point in this passage entirely and to wield it like a weapon against people that they think don't meet their moral standards. And if that is our take, we're definitely reading Romans chapter 1 in the wrong way. In addition to that, it can be difficult for us to know what to do with teaching about God's wrath when we encounter that in the Bible.

If our reference point for God's wrath is human wrath, then it's easy to fall into thinking that God's wrath must be over the top and out of control.

[1:36] Finally, in this passage, we see a lot of unflattering stuff said about they and them.

In this passage, who are they and them? We probably won't like the answer to that question because it is not a comfortable answer. This is one of those difficult passages of Scripture because it tells us a painful truth rather than a pleasant lie.

But let's never forget that we need the whole counsel of God, do we not? So this passage actually came up in our Life Explored session last Wednesday night.

If you were there, you caught part of this. Interestingly enough, the first session of Life Explored described human beings as the glory and the garbage of the universe.

This morning, we have the opportunity in our appointed reading to see why human beings might be described as the garbage of the universe.

[2:44] Which leads to our opening question. Who is this passage describing? I think the answer is pretty clear from verse 18, which reads that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

So, who is that? Well, all human beings have been ungodly and unrighteous, right? This is a portrait in this passage of fallen humanity.

And do not think that you are exempt from this unflattering picture. Because you're not and neither am I. Every human being who has ever been lost in sin, and that's all of us by the way, has been here.

If you don't think that fallen humanity is depraved, think about the current drive that's causing people to irrationally hoard up all of the disinfectants and toilet paper from stores for themselves. Not carrying one bit that my family is almost out of toilet paper, right? So, how do we end up in this condition?

[4:05] What does this condition look like? That's what I want us to consider this morning. But first, what is this wrath of God that Paul is talking about?

Hearing about the wrath of God makes us squirm a little bit, doesn't it? But God's wrath is not God flying off the handle. It is his firm and utter and holy opposition to sin and evil.

It's good that God is like this, that he is a God who is not okay with evil. The discomfort comes from the fact that deep down, we all know that we have been evil and sinful ourselves.

How does that play out in the lives of human beings? Paul describes the progression.

First, human beings suppress the truth about God. Paul writes in verses 19 and 20, For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them.

[5:09] 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. That's interesting, isn't it? God's existence and God's power are obvious to all of us.

It's not that God has done a faulty job of demonstrating his existence. To the contrary, the problem is on our side.

It's obvious to us that a powerful and glorious God created everything that exists. Think about that. Deep down, we all know that God exists.

The trouble is that we, as human beings, live in a state of denial about it, suppressing that knowledge even in ourselves. Why in the world would we do that?

[6:17] Well, it makes a certain kind of sense. If God's existence and God's attributes are plain to us, wouldn't that mean that we would have to acknowledge that he is God and we aren't?

Doesn't it mean furthermore that we have to acknowledge that he calls the shots and we don't? And what's really hard is that we have to acknowledge that we are sinners because we have suppressed the truth about God and unrighteousness.

So as human beings, what do we do? As fallen human beings, we live in a state of denial. What are the consequences of that?

Paul goes on. So the basic human problem, what's wrong with the world, is that we have denied the truth and we have fallen into worshipping false gods instead of the true and the living God.

The root of human sin is idolatry, ultimately. We will always find something to worship, even if we're not religious at all, if we don't think of ourselves that way.

[7:57] And God, how has he responded? In his righteous judgment, he has said, if that's really what we want to do, we can have our fill of it.

Paul writes, Amen. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring 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. So, how does that tendency express itself? Well, it expresses itself in all kinds of sinful behavior.

Paul writes, 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 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.

So, Paul is talking directly about same-sex sexual activity here, but it does also need to be said, it should be said, that every kind of lust, fornication, adultery, sexual sin, is ultimately an expression of human idolatry.

[9:41] Our worship of created things rather than our creator, and our rebellion against God. And that rebellion doesn't limit itself merely to sexual sin.

Paul goes on, 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 gossip, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

So somewhere in Paul's description of sinful humanity, lest we be tempted to point the finger at other people, you and I can find all of the sins we have ever committed.

And seeing that should drive us to repentance, shouldn't it? But often it doesn't. Paul goes on, Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them, but give approval to those who practice them.

[11:10] It has been said that misery loves company, so we tend not only to wallow in sin ourselves, we approve of other people joining the party.

So, that's a sobering description. What is the condition of fallen humanity? Well, we have suppressed the truth about God, we've taken to the worship of idols, and that is evident in the sins that we commit.

Oh dear. This is a tough passage. Sorry, little ones. To that point, this is really hard for us to hear, isn't it?

Because this passage is not fuel for us to point out how bad we think other people are. Not at all. This passage, to the contrary, is talking either about what we are or what we have been. [12 : 33] What do we do with that? Is that the end of the story? It's not.

Why isn't it the end of the story? Why doesn't the story close that way? Why? Let's summarize it in two words.

Jesus Christ. Because God gave His only Son to die for those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

Because God gave His only Son to die for idolaters. Because God gave His only Son to die for the sexually immoral. Because God gave His only Son to die for the unrighteous and the evil.

God gave His only Son to die for the envious, the murderer, and the liar. In short, God gave His only Son to die even for those who hate Him.

[13 : 40] God loves the sinful and the broken. God loves those who have messed up so badly that they deserve death.

Think about that. So what does God do? God offers eternal life to those who deserve death.

As believers, isn't that why we're here? Because God has not dealt with us as we deserve. and because no one has ever turned to Christ for mercy and been turned away.

The Gospel is all about God's redeeming love in Christ extended to the unworthy. If you have seen yourself in Paul's description this morning in Romans 1, remember what that ultimately means.

You need Jesus and so do I. He is in the business of saving sinners and transforming lives.

[14 : 55] And again, no one ever goes to Jesus for mercy and is turned away. Not even those who have been haters of God.

As Paul will go on to write in Romans chapter 5, For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die. But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God.

the wrath of God has been revealed against all unrighteousness. But there is rescue and there is pardon in the name of Jesus Christ.

[16 : 10] We have been all things unholly, but God has demonstrated His saving love for us in the death and resurrection of His only Son.

As I think about how this applies to our lives, I'm reminded of what Martin Luther wrote in his commentary on Galatians centuries ago.

It may have been centuries ago, but it's still true. Luther wrote, when the devil accuses us and says, you are a sinner and therefore damned, we should answer, because you say I'm a sinner, I will be righteous and saved.

No, says the devil, you will be damned. And I reply, no, for I flee to Christ who gave Himself for my sins. Satan, you will not prevail against me when you try to terrify me.

by setting forth the greatness of my sins and try to bring me into heaviness, distrust, despair, hatred, contempt, and blasphemy against God.

[17 : 24] On the contrary, when you say I am a sinner, you give me armor and weapons against yourself, so that with your own sword I may cut your throat and tread you under my feet.

For Christ died for sinners. So I can truly say with Paul this morning that I am not ashamed of the gospel.

What about you? In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.