

"The Just Wrath of God" Romans 1:18–25

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[0:00] The reading for this morning is Romans 1 verses 18 to 25. 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 know God, 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 fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creepy things. Creeping.

Therefore God gave them up in their 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.

[1:08] Amen. A couple weeks ago in Romans chapter 1, 16 and 17, we read how the gospel is the power and revealed righteousness of God.

And a very important question that we didn't answer last week, but that follows Romans chapter 1, 16 and 17, is this. Why does humanity need God to show his power and righteousness to us?

The answer to that question can be a source of great discomfort, even offense. For our text this week, Romans 1, 18 to 25, will tell us that humanity needs the gospel of God to save us from the wrath of God.

The wrath, as we'll find out, is directed at all of humanity for their moral and social corruption, and that no one is exempt. And such a God in 21st century Ottawa, 2026, it seems such a God is aggressive and unrelenting and maybe even vindictive.

Where is the love? Where is the grace? Where is the acceptance? Where is gentle Jesus, meek and mild? It's a very uncomfortable question to wrestle with about God's wrath.

[2:32] And yet, it's a question that the church has wrestled with for centuries. In fact, one of the earliest issues that arose in the church, one of the earliest controversies, came in the second century with a man named Marcion.

And he decided to do something about this wrathful and angry God that he found in the Bible. And what he ended up doing was taking the Bible and chopping it up, bringing a giant pair of scissors to it, cutting out the entire Old Testament, cutting out large portions of the New Testament, so that all that was left was this benevolent and loving God.

Any hint of wrath, any hint of anger was gone. And it's been like this throughout the centuries, throughout the history of the church. The wrath of God is a very uncomfortable thing that Christians wrestle with.

But as we're going to see in the text today, the wrath of God is actually a key aspect of who God is. It's not to say that you can just remove or downplay the wrath of God and lift up or elevate, rather, his love.

But the wrath of God is a key aspect of who he is. In fact, it is in keeping with his righteousness. For both his righteousness and his wrath are introduced by Paul in the exact same way.

[3:56] Two weeks ago, when we were in Romans 1, 16 and 17, Paul says in verse 17 that the righteousness of God is being revealed. And here in verse 18, he'll talk about the wrath of God that is being revealed.

Paul speaks of both righteous, God's righteousness and his wrath, introducing it in the same type of way. So we're going to look at what the wrath of God is and why it is rightly directed at sinful and corrupted humanity.

And we'll see that God's wrath is rightly directed at those who suppress the truth, those who steal God's honor, and those who misplace their worship to other things and other people beside the one true God.

We have a lot of ground to cover. So if you want to turn to page 8 of your scripture journal or Romans 1, verse 18 in your Bible, we'll jump right into it.

So we'll look at God's wrath that is directed and revealed to those who suppress the truth, verses 18 to 20. And this is what it says. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

[5:16] 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.

So a really important first point to make is that the wrath of God here isn't this kind of symbolic way to speak of the consequences of evil.

There's a great temptation to, like Marcion, save God from his wrath.

That we need to do some reputation therapy for the Lord so that he does not come across as a wrathful God. So wrath could be potentially understood as more of like a euphemism of something else except that right off the bat in verses 18, we see that the wrath of God is actually a personal wrath.

It's manifested by God himself. It is not this idea of something, of the just consequences of evil, but rather it is wrath from God himself as if wrath would come from me or from you.

[6:40] This is what it means when the apostle says that the wrath is being revealed from heaven for that is God's dwelling place.

It's an important observation because God's personal wrath implies that the offense that provokes it for all the consequences and the collateral damage that comes about from such evil is first and foremost against God.

The offense that provokes God's wrath is an evil rebellion against his person, against who he is and what he has done.

It denies God as the eternal king, as creator and as Lord. It seeks to destroy or corrupt or malign God's good design and properly ordered creation.

Because we do not have the power to do so, we instead attempt to suppress the truth. So it's as if we say to God, you are not worthy to be God, you are not worthy to sit on your throne, we will be the ones who will take over and yet we do not have the power to do so.

[7:50] So we go on a bit of a smear campaign. We suppress the truth. We deny that God exists. And because we can deny that God exists, it frees us from his supposed tyrannical rule.

And Paul describes such behavior as ungodliness and unrighteousness. It's an evil first against God and then it's an evil then that leads us to denigrate and to downplay the integrity of fellow people.

We suppress the truth. And this is something that all humans, Paul says, are guilty of. Every person has knowledge that there is a God and yet every person in some way or another suppresses the truth.

It's an audacious claim that Paul makes here. Every human heart understands that there is a divine creator. It's a bit of a difficult thing to wrestle with because many of us know people that are atheists.

Maybe we ourselves are good churchgoers, but if we are oppressed, maybe we have atheistic tendencies or atheistic thoughts, atheistic beliefs.

[9:08] And yet Paul says, every human heart understands that there is a divine creator. He is, verse 20, eternally powerful and divine, meaning that he is not some mortal super being or a figment of one's imagination, that he is eternal and divine.

And this is something that God has revealed in the created world for all of humanity to see. So theologians throughout the centuries have called this God's natural revelation, that the invisible and unknowable God has made himself visible and knowable to humanity.

And he's done this in at least three different ways. The first is through creation. The world we live in is vast and complex. It's capable of supporting life and not just supporting life, but seeing life flourish.

Everything is perfectly calibrated and intertwined. Consider the cosmos and the sheer size of the universe we inhabit. To think that all of this is a result of chance and time is to be blind to a designer, an intelligent designer, God as designer.

Sir Isaac Newton, he speaks of God's intelligent design this way. He says, in the absence of any proof, the thumb alone would convince me of God's existence. The second way, and I'm going a bit quickly through these examples of God's natural revelation, the second way that God has made himself noble is through beauty.

[10:42] That there is something that can be observed objectively as beautiful, and that this is proof that life isn't merely about survival, but that it is about enjoyment and an elevation of the spirit.

This is key to our existence. Good music and good song and good poetry and good art. All of it, it is the means by which beauty is conveyed and it seems that it is not just something that is peripheral, but is rather integral.

It is something that we need to see. A life devoid of beauty is a life devoid of goodness, a life devoid of enjoyment, and ultimately it points to a source of beauty.

And then finally, God has revealed himself in the universality of morality, of ethics, meaning that whenever there is injustice felt, wherever there is theft or murder or deception or abuse, and the like, it is identified as not good.

Conversely, benevolence and joy and love in its purest forms, it is recognized and it is heralded as good. And these things mean that we can know what is right and wrong objectively, and it isn't merely a social construct or socially conditioned.

[12:14] All such knowledge and creation and beauty and morality, they are means by which God makes himself known to all and reveals our need to be connected and reconciled with him.

Whether we can articulate it in a biblical way or not, God has left proof of his existence and has put within us a yearning to touch the transcendent to in some way connect with the divine.

However, this is where we bump up against the limits of natural revelation. For although it reveals our need to be connected to God, our desire to be connected to him, it doesn't offer salvation.

Or put another way, natural revelation shows us our need for salvation, our need to be reconciled with God, but it cannot be our means of salvation. Yet Paul says that all this was denied and suppressed.

There is no God, or if the God of the scripture is not that God, then his lordship has no claim upon us. Functionally, we function, rather, as people that are in open rebellion to God, denying his existence or at the very least denying his lordship.

[13:33] And unfortunately for us, suppressing the truth has dire consequences. It will limit our ability to know what truly makes us human and what our purpose is because all that makes humanity truly human, it has to be connected to God for he is the one who made us, he designed us, he has breathed life into us.

We are made in his image and his likeness and most importantly for his glory and purposes. It means that our existence has a true end, a true telos and it is found in union with God himself. But in a pluralistic society, especially one we live in, all of this can be easily denied. I mean, again, you know atheists, your friends, family members, again, maybe you yourself, you're wrestling with it and a lot of these people live very good and moral and upright lives.

The God of the Bible or any other God for that matter can be denied and life seems to continue to flourish, progress continues unabated, but is that really the case?

This leads to our second point that the wrath of God is revealed against those who steal his honor. Look with me at verses 21 and 22. For although they knew God, 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.

[15:02] Claiming to be wise, they became fools. Paul is doing something subtle but unmistakable. He is universalizing this open rebellion against God by linking it not to culture, not to an era, not to a specific social or ethnic group, but to the very first parents of all of humanity because

this is a very subtle but unmistakable link to the opening chapters of Genesis.

So what Paul is doing here in this section but really in all of verses 18 to 32, he is rehearsing the fall of man that we can read about in Genesis chapter 3.

When sin entered the world, when mankind became corrupted and bent, such suppression of the truth has been happening since the very beginning in every place and among every people ever since.

It always culminates in idolatry, idolatry being the worship of any, sorry, the worshipping of and sacrificing to something or someone other than God.

In this case, mankind tries to claim creation apart from God, feeling justified in being more than just a steward of God's good creation and a worshiper of God.

[16:25] Instead, we assume the role of creator, claiming with such bravado that we can truly enjoy life apart from the one true God. We say to ourselves that we are the change makers.

We are the beauty creators. We are the benevolent ones. We are the ones worthy to be glorified and honored. There's no honor directed to God, no thanksgiving for his gift of life, no recognition of his goodness and provision of grace, understanding that the entire cosmos, all of creation, was designed by him intelligently and lovingly for our benefits.

I've likened it in some ways to stolen valor, if you've seen it on the news around Remembrance Day or Veterans Day in the States, people that have never served will dress up in military dress and take part in a ceremony as if they served, as if they sacrificed and it is incredibly offensive to steal the honor of those that have served, veterans or active duty members of the armed forces and it's very similar to what we are doing only on a very, very more grand scale.

We try to steal God's honor and his valor. We do not thank him for who he is and ironically, we do not produce this new or better creation or even build and approve upon the existing one but only distort and corrupt God's good and godly design.

I watched a movie so I was sick all week. I watched way too much Netflix and Prime but I ended up watching a movie that highlighted a type of architecture called brutalism and it was an alright story.

[18:20] We talk about the movie after but the one thing about architecture, brutalist architecture is that it is devoid of beauty and you could say well listen, there's meaning behind it, there's, you know, okay, I'm not convinced personally that brutalism could ever be beautiful and I think in some ways when we engage in creation that does not look to the Lord, does not recognize who he is, does not bring honor to him, then we end up building something that does not seem beautiful or good or doesn't bring our eyes up to the divine to transcend this world but instead it leaves us kind of feeling cold and it feels ugly and I think it's very clear that this is the outworking of Adam's rebellion.

Here's the thing, such stolen honor and the suppression of the truth causes a great deal of delusion. We fashion ourselves as being more clever than we are, we reimagine the world in our own image and with our own ideals and in doing so what we do is we cut ourselves from the source of wisdom and knowledge and beauty and goodness so that in thinking we are wise we become utterly foolish. This is what the apostle is getting at in verses 21 and 22. Verse 22, claiming to be wise they have become fools. By the way, this is a reflection of our intellect.

The modern materialistic atheistic mind has created incredible technologies, has deciphered many mysteries but its end is always in self-congratulation and self-aggrandizement.

Never for the glory of God. Never thanking him or honoring him. Never helping other people look up and turn their gaze upward.

[20:18] Therefore our minds never truly ascend or become enlightened. They only become more clouded and darkened. And now we begin to understand how the wrath of God is revealed here because we see that God leaves us to reap what we sow.

As we shed his good and godly lordship we find that we are no longer connected to this source and substance of life because God doesn't simply create the world but he sustains the world by his power in Hebrews chapter 1 verse 3.

So we have no hope of supplanting him, of kicking him off the throne and doing a better job than him. We are powerless to do what only he can do. We can't create a world and we certainly can't sustain it.

And in God's just wrath what does he do? He allows us to feel the futility of our thinking and the outworking of our actions to know the darkness of our foolish hearts. We'll see this in the next section as we see the utter futility of misplaced worship.

Read with me verses 22 to 25. 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 creeping things.

[21:43] 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 forever blessed.

Amen. The knowledge of God should lead us to worship him. It should begin the pursuit of knowing him in deeper ways engaging with him and transcending this life to enter into the divine life with the transcendent God or at least die trying.

That's what it should lead to. However as we have seen the suppression of the truth of God and the subsequent theft of his glory and honor render such a pursuit impossible.

You cannot worship one you deny. You cannot worship one whom you steal glory from. But friends that doesn't mean we're not worshipers. Our worship is merely redirected from God to something else.

So throughout the Bible the understanding is not if humans worship but what do they worship or who do they worship.

[22:53] The Bible takes for granted that human beings worship. We are worshipping beings. It's the way God has created us. And the who and most often here in Ottawa it's the what we worship.

the what we worship will dictate how we live. And in every case misplaced worship away from the one true triune God and towards other things it will always result in some form of immorality.

And this is what Paul is referring to here in verse 24. Verse 24 he says therefore God gave them up. By the way we'll see this next week when we look at verses 22 to the end of 32 that God that the Apostle Paul will say that God gave them up three different times.

It's the way in which God reveals his justice. He gives us over lets us reap what we sow but that God gave us up to the lusts of our flesh literally our desires but our over desires our desires without limits without any kind of checks such over desires of the heart lead to impurity to the dishonoring of our bodies among ourselves.

So next week we're going to look at how such giving over to these over desires will touch every aspect of who we are including our sexuality but even here in verses 24 and 25 we begin to see how God gives us up to feel the full extent of our misplaced worship as our desires are unrestrained as they are over desires.

[24:42] So let me give a few examples. If we over desire success above all what will we do to get that success? We will sacrifice our integrity our commitments to family our ethics may go out the window they may no longer seem like a strength but a liability we will do whatever we can to be successful and ironically the true form of success isn't the accumulation of things or titles but is to have well ordered loving relationships.

So a well sorry for over desire for success will not result in success in the end but will instead result in a life that is broken.

If we over desire belonging or respect above all we will compromise our convictions we'll take offense easily we will not offer forgiveness liberally it's a recipe for loneliness it is not a recipe for respect or belonging and you could fill in some more I'll give one final example if we over desire pleasure we can see people not as worthy of integrity but as objects to use lust will be justified as necessary maybe even integral to who we are self control will go out the window will be downplayed we will never know real pleasure only the painful pursuit of chasing after something we can never attain.

This is what the apostle Paul is saying that the wrath of God is being revealed how? By God giving us up to our own over desires to reap what we sow.

We begin to see this full picture of God's revealed wrath it is giving us what our truth suppressing valor stealing misplaced worshiping hearts overly desire God no longer shields us from ourselves so that we experience rather the fullness of our futility not the fullness of his goodness friends such a life will not lead to godliness or righteousness but to again we see this in verses 18 and 19 ungodliness and unrighteousness and this is always a lesser life it is always a subpar existence this is the core of idolatry we sacrifice and sacrifice and sacrifice for a promise that will never deliver psalm 115 says that those that sacrifice to idols become like them which is to say less human broken and frail but praise be to god there is a better way see unlike the false gods that we find ourselves worshiping and sacrificing to the triune god does not demand our sacrifice for appeasement and satisfaction of his wrath for he knows we are incapable of such a sacrifice instead god the son of god comes to us taking upon himself human flesh becoming fully human and offering himself as a sacrifice for us in order that we putting our trust in him are no longer subject to the just wrath of god why how for we begin by faith to come under his good and godly rule we recognize that the righteousness and the power we need are not found within but our gifts from without to be received by faith and as we learn to live according to his ways trusting in his word our lives become fashioned according to his will and by his power we begin to flourish as he intended us to flourish and that doesn't mean by the way that we will live materially better lives but that we will have a satisfaction and a joy we will know a love that will transcend this life into the life to come we will know our telos we will know our purpose we will know our end our lives will become rightly ordered we can then learn to live not by lies learn to give glory and honor and thanksgiving to god we will learn to rightly worship him as the only one worthy of all honor and praise and then we begin to enjoy life for what it is a gift and if you were here through ecclesiastes this is really a huge message of ecclesiastes the joy of a rightly ordered life if your life is not rightly ordered this morning and I'm sure there are parts of your life that are certainly not rightly ordered where you have over desires and they are wreaking havoc maybe you're good at suppressing them in some kind of way to do a bit of crisis management but if you're honest you have a problem with suppressing the truth you have a problem with not giving god the honor and glory and thanksgiving he deserves you have a problem with worshiping other things and not the one true god who is eternally blessed forever amen then look to him call out to him confess your sin to him confess your need for him and watch what he will do ask him to rightly order your lives and friends by god's good grace and kindness he will help you will you embrace the gospel

[30:34] by faith this morning