

The Dark Exchange

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[0 : 00] So, that's our passage. And for those who are visiting here this evening, the preacher doesn't get to choose the passage.

We're going through Romans and this is the next chunk we're looking at. And of course, context is very, very important.

So I want to start by talking about that context. This whole section is all within the context of why Paul is so eager to preach in Rome.

From verse 15, he says that last week. And he says, I want to preach in Rome. And he gives a couple of reasons. Firstly, he says, I want to get there. I'm eager to preach because I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it's the power to save.

Secondly, because it reveals God's righteousness. You know, I want to preach because when people hear the gospel, they'll realize how amazing and awesome God is. And thirdly, because the wrath of God is directed towards those who reject him.

[1 : 10] And this is the bit that we're looking at this evening. Now remember, Paul is a master of compression and he puts a whole lot of theology into a few verses here. And what he's trying to do in this little section here is he's trying to give us a complete picture of the gospel.

And he can't do that. He can't give us a complete picture of the gospel without talking about God's wrath. In other words, you don't understand salvation unless you understand how angry God is at sin.

Now this is not a popular topic. And it's not popular because we like to talk about and hear about what we have been saved into.

We've been saved into a relationship with God. That's good stuff. We've been saved into heaven, into a wonderful church family. But this passage is all about what we have been saved from.

You might think, yes, but it's all a bit negative. You know, I don't want to kind of, I don't want to talk about this stuff.

[2 : 28] It's a bit negative. Well, I mean, it's not negative. I think that the concepts of negative and positive are probably not ideas we want to apply to the Bible.

Because the Bible is neither negative or positive. It is the truth. I mean, if you're really sick, this is an example, okay.

If you're, let's say I'm really sick. Let's say that, you know, I've got a, my chest feels very tight and I'm feeling nauseous and my arms are like tingly or something. And I've got a bit of a headache and it's like, I don't know, like blood coming out of my eyeballs or something.

I've got a runny nose and sore teeth. When you go to the doctor, you want, you don't want the doctor to be Mr. Positive.

You don't want the doctor to be Mr. Positive guy so much so that, that all he says to you is stuff to make you feel better. Like, oh, it's probably nothing.

[3 : 38] You're probably just a bit gassy. You know, I've got blood coming out of my eyes. Like, oh, I just, it's probably just gas. No, you want, you want the doctors, you want the doctors to tell you the truth, right?

When you go to a, a, a, a financial planner or a lawyer, you want them to tell you the truth. And certainly when it comes to something so important as, as this, you know, our relationship with God, we want, we want to know the truth.

And this is what we have in Romans 1. Some very crisp, clear truth. And it rattles us, doesn't it? It rattles us. So let's just, let's, let's just get at it. Okay, verse 18. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

God is angry at those who reject him. And we don't like the idea of an angry God.

[4 : 46] And we don't like it for a couple of reasons. One, because we may think it's unbiblical. I mean, didn't, you know, Jesus on the Mount talk about how anger is just like murder or something?

Didn't he say something like that? How can God be angry? But here's the thing, man, is that our anger is not like God's anger. You know, we lose our temper. Our anger is uncontrolled.

God's anger is settled. And it's rightfully directed. Unlike our anger, which is directed at sometimes silly things. And we get angry because we don't get our way sometimes.

That's kind of what our anger looks like. God's anger is not like that. There's another problem with God's anger. Well, we think. We think that anger or wrath is the opposite of love.

But it's not. It's absolutely not. Many years ago, someone in a Chicago subway wrote very high up some graffiti.

[5 : 50] Some famous graffiti. And it said this. God is dead. Signed Nietzsche. And somebody crossed that out and wrote, Nietzsche is dead. Signed, God.

Somebody wrote, crossed that out and wrote, God is dead. See Time magazine, 1966. Somebody crossed that out and said, Time magazine is dead. Signed, God. Somebody crossed that out and wrote, God isn't dead.

I spoke to him this morning. Signed, Billy Graham. Somebody crossed that out and wrote, Who's Billy Graham? Signed, God. And so people kept writing stuff and crossing it out until finally somebody wrote this.

God isn't dead. He just doesn't want to get involved. And nobody wrote anything else after that. It was as if they had sort of summed up this great fear that we have.

That God doesn't want to get involved. That God is indifferent. And that, people. That is the opposite of love.

[6 : 53] Not anger. Indifference is the opposite of love. Not anger. And thankfully, God is not indifferent towards evil. No living being can be indifferent to evil.

Or God wouldn't be perfectly loving if he wasn't angry at the right thing. So all that's to say, we have a God of wrath. And it's completely consistent with the idea of a God of love.

In fact, you can't have a God of love without a God who is angry. So let's keep moving here. The object of God's anger in this passage is towards the ungodly and unrighteous actions of people. The act of wanting to live for yourself. And the obvious argument is, yes, but God can't be angry with me.

Because I didn't even know there was a God. They cared about this stuff. Some people will say that. That could be an argument. Paul addresses that very quickly in verse 20.

[7 : 53] He says, well, creation tells us that there is a God. Look around. There's got to be something behind all of this. But we suppress it. And when we suppress it, when we suppress the truth as the passage says, this is what happens.

Verse 23. They exchange the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. You may suppress the knowledge of God and that he should be worshipped.

But you cannot suppress the urge to worship something. You cannot suppress the urge to put your trust in something. You cannot suppress the urge of your heart to give its allegiance to something. Because the passage only gives us two options. It's God or it's something else. But you will trust in something else and you will give your allegiance to something else. There is no vacuum there. And the things we give our allegiance to, if they're not God, are silly.

And I think the passage brings that out. It says creeping things. Even creeping things. People make idols out of creeping things. Spiders. And you think, well, I don't do that.

[8 : 55] But maybe you've made an idol out of your career. Or possessions. All stuff that doesn't last. And it's going to get all... It's just... It's stuff that will disappoint you.

So far, here's what I've learned. God is angry. And it's okay that he's angry. It's not inconsistent with his other attributes.

His anger is directed at those who reject him and worship other things. Okay. The next question the text answers is this. What does that anger look like?

What does God's judgment look like? How does it present itself in real life? Well, it looks like judgment. And it is judgment.

You know, the outworking of God's anger is judgment. Now, people often make two mistakes when thinking about judgment. The first is this.

[10:03] We think of it comically as God sort of zapping people. The second mistake is we think of it as only something that's going to happen in the future and this big one-off event when God makes everything right.

That will happen. But it's not the only act of judgment. See, this passage tells us that judgment's happening right now. That's what all this God-gave-them-up stuff is about.

That's judgment. Verse 24. God gave them up to the lusts of the flesh. 26. God gave them up to dishonorable passions. 28. God gave them up to a debased mind.

God's judgment here is letting people experience the consequences of rejecting him. He lets them have their way.

So it's not the comical version of judgment like God zapping you. God going, I'll get you. It's, I'll leave you. I'm going to leave you.

[11:08] And humanity gets what it wants. And it's not that great. And the rest of the text is all about what that looks like. When God lets them go.

When God gives them over. And we see from the passage here, it just leads to a corrupted life. Look at verses 29 and 30.

It's a pretty exhaustive list. Envy, murder, disobeying your parents, gossip. This is what happens when people are left to their own devices. That's God's judgment. But what's really interesting is that Paul singles out homosexuality in verse 24 to 26 as his first example of corruption.

And why is that? I mean, don't you find that odd? That Paul would do that. It's not that Paul had a particular hang-up about homosexuality.

And it's not that Paul had in mind things like there was this cultic practice of temple prostitution, male temple prostitution.

[12:27] There was also a practice in the Roman world of older men exploiting young men and boys sexually under the guise of teaching them the ways of being a man.

I mean, those things were common practice at the time. And that exploitation is horrible. But that's not what it says in the text, you know.

And it's not just that Paul sort of is like, oh, well, we Jews, we just don't like this kind of thing. So I'm just going to pick on that first. Noah's main point in the passage, if you look carefully, it's this.

It's not what males and females were made for. He uses the word natural, unnatural a few times here.

And he's clearly referencing the creation story in this passage. It's just not what you were made for.

Now, it is really, really important that you see that he is not saying that there are particularly naughty people out there who do stuff like this.

[13:36] You know, this passage is not a license for us to hold up homosexuality as just the worst sin in the Bible. That's not what it's saying. Because this whole text, this whole Romans 1 stuff, it's all about humanity as a whole.

And Paul is saying the fact that homosexuality exists is a sign that the human race in general is just out of joint.

The created order is broken. And homosexuality is a very vivid example of this. Is everyone with me so far?

Yeah? Okay. So far, here is what we've got, okay? God is wrathful. It's not inconsistent with his love. His anger is directed at those who ignore him.

When we ignore God, the created order is affected. And judgment looks like God letting his people experience the ongoing consequences of rejecting that created order.

[14:43] All right. I'm starting to wrap up here. Back to our original question. Why was Paul not ashamed of the gospel? He's not ashamed because we've been saved to something wonderful, something amazing.

To eternity with God in heaven. To a wonderful family of believers. To a relationship with our Creator. God gives us the Holy Spirit to help banish our idols in our life, you know.

So we get to experience some restoration here. That's all great stuff that we've been saved to. But we have been saved from something terrible. We've been saved from God's wrath.

And so, in summary, the bombshell of Romans 1, 18-32 is this. Salvation is God saving us from himself.

And ironically, it's in this wrath that we see how wonderful his love is, I think.

[15 : 56] Because unless we come to grips with this kind of frightening doctrine and this frightening text, I just don't think we'd ever get to really comprehend the depth of what Jesus did on the cross.

I mean, Christ's body was destroyed in the worst possible way. But that was nothing compared to what was happening in his soul, you know. Because God poured his wrath onto Jesus.

That's what was going on there. It wasn't like, well, you know, like, well, if these people beat up Jesus and kill him, everything's okay. No, God poured his wrath onto Jesus.

Jesus experienced hell. He experienced the wrath of God. Jesus became the object of God's wrath so that we could escape it at the appointed time.

And that's why Paul's so committed to us understanding this. Because without it, without understanding this, we don't understand the cross. Amen.