

God's Kindness and Wrath

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[0 : 0 0] Now, Father, we pray now as we turn to your word that you would open your hand and that you would satisfy the deepest desires we have for the glory of your Son, we ask. Amen.

Amen.

Tragedy turned to triumph as these guys were literally taken from their graves and the moments when they got to the surface and joined their wives or family or whoever they were.

I understand. I was moved and I thought that the greetings at the top, those moments where words weren't spoken, is a little picture of what's at the heart of the passage here, Romans 2, 1 to 11.

You might be surprised to hear that because at first sight it looks like a passage intended to frighten us out of our wits. I mean, it seems full of the wrath and judgment of God, his fury and his indignation and his anger.

[1 : 4 0] The trouble is we have such a deeply twisted view of God's wrath, it's almost impossible for us to think straight about it.

If you were here last week, remember Dan speaking from the end of chapter 1. Paul tells us in chapter 1 that our basic approach to spiritual things is to suppress the truth.

In fact, he says in 25 that we exchange the truth of God for the lie, not just any lie, the lie. The lie that is as old as the world.

The lie that Satan brought to Adam and Eve in the garden that you can't really trust God to decide what's right and wrong for you. You are in a much better position to be able to do that and things would work out if it was left up to you.

And as soon as Satan gets Eve thinking that way, the very first truth of God that Satan denies is what? It's judgment. He says, you will not die.

[2 : 4 7] And that's the lie he's been trying to get us to believe ever since. And we have some very sophisticated ways of suppressing this truth. You know, if you feel deep down that somehow God's wrath and judgment might just be unfair.

Or that it's just a tad unworthy of God to have wrath. Or that we've evolved now to be more compassionate and loving beings. It just means you and I, we swallow the lie.

And what Paul does in chapter 2 is he whips the rug from underneath us and he doesn't waste any time and he addresses each of us now as individuals.

He stops speaking in the third term about humanity in general. He gets very specific. You see verse 1, O man, O woman. And he says, what you've done with all your sophisticated moralising and reasoning and philosophy is that you've appointed yourself as judge in God's place.

So I was interested as the passage was read earlier. It is a little bit unsettling, isn't it? And I think the reason it's unsettling is because it takes a vast amount of energy to dislodge us from our own judgement seat.

[4 : 02] But it's only when that little throne that we've put up for ourselves begins to wobble that we actually hear what God is saying. Because the truth or the revelation of God's wrath is not the bottom line.

It's not the ultimate truth here. And I want you to see this. In the passage it's revealed to turn tragedy into triumph. So I want to ask two questions to get us to the heart of the passage.

What is God seeking and what are you seeking? So let's look at this first question. What is God seeking? Remember, the apostle, he's just finished a fairly gruesome description of a culture given over to greed, self-indulgence, sexual deviation.

And there are many people, perhaps some of us here, who say, well, yes, that's right. Very well done, the apostle Paul. The world does seem to be getting worse and worse and going downhill.

It's a good thing to reassert traditional values. And the apostle swings straight back on every person who thinks they're not in camp, chapter 1, and says this verse 1 of chapter 2.

[5 : 21] Therefore, you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges, for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.

Now, Paul has the widest possible audience here. He may be speaking to a Greek moralist or a Jewish religious moralist or even an atheist moralist.

It doesn't matter. But if you begin to think you're better than others and you judge others on their behaviour, there's only one little problem, and that is that you do the same things yourself.

And worse, in doing them and judging others, you're trying to usurp God's place as judge. But our behaviour doesn't give us a leg to stand on.

You remember the parable of the prodigal son that Jesus told, that the two boys, the youngest son, he went off and indulged himself in loose living until he realised his wretchedness.

[6 : 26] That's Romans 1. But he has an older brother who's well behaved and morally superior, never strayed from home, always did the right thing. But he was just as lost.

His heart was as hard as stone to the father. And all his moral superiority only served to make him miserable. And the warning for us in this passage is that there is an upright, morally respectable, even religious way to be totally lost spiritually.

You can be an educational moralist. You can be an environmental moralist. You can be an evangelical moralist. Full of oughts and shoulds and musts for other people.

But all it does is take us further from the father's love and makes us miserable. The simple truth is, brothers and sisters, it's no surprise that we're all hypocrites.

Our behaviour tells the truth. We do exactly what we condemn in other people, only we do it more sneakily. I mean, there's nothing more galling than seeing my faults in someone else.

[7 : 42] You know, if you're an arrogant person, you're going to be hypersensitive to arrogance in others. If you're a greedy person, you'll smell greed a mile away. And nobody dislikes a snob more than a real snob.

And on the Day of Judgment, when we stand before God, as each of us will, and the video of our lives is played back, all we need as a soundtrack is a recording of what we've said other people ought to do.

Because by our own standards, we are all gold medal hypocrites. And I think this is a particular temptation for evangelical Christians.

I mean, we believe in right and wrong. We're some of the brave few who still do, right? And we hold people to a standard. And as we do that, it makes us feel better about ourselves.

And subtly, we begin to excuse our own behaviour. And we fool ourselves. And sometimes we fool other people. But we cannot fool God. And Paul says, in passing judgment on another, you condemn yourself because you practice the same things.

[8 : 51] It's a fundamental human dynamic. And it doesn't just happen in church land. The self-appointed moral watchdogs in Western culture have become journalists and celebrities.

And journalists love exposing hypocrisy, particularly religious hypocrisy in others. But when you put their lives under scrutiny, which rarely happens, you find they're doing exactly what they expose in others.

Or perhaps closer to home, one of the most perverse and sophisticated ways we usurp God's role as judge is we parrot that slogan, oh, I don't judge anybody.

Even on things where God is crystal clear, I will refuse to take up some sort of position and I become proud of my non-judgmentalism and I begin to feel self-righteous because I'm not self-righteous.

It can be just another way of pretending that I'm nicer and more loving than God because I won't judge something God won't either.

[9 : 57] Look at verse 3. Do you suppose, oh man, oh woman, you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?

No matter what standard you bring to bear on your life or other people's lives, you and I are guilty of crossing those standards. But what a contrast the judgment of God is.

And Paul tells us three things about the judgment of God here. The first is, his judgment is utterly just, righteous and fair.

If you look down at verse 2, the words read, we know that the judgment of God rightly falls. In the original, it's God judges according to truth.

No double standard, no special pleading. The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. In verse 5, Paul calls it God's righteous judgment, absolute level playing field.

[11 : 01] No favourites, no Jew-Gentile distinction there. Or in verse 11, God shows no partiality. Literally, God does not receive face.

He's not swayed by outward appearance or what others think. There's no corruption, no deals. On that judgment day, he unmask us and he sees the truth and his judgment is just and righteous.

Secondly, in verse 6, we are told God's judgment will be according to our works. Now, I want to come back to this in just a minute, but let me point out that it's not just our outward works.

Down in verse 16, it is the secrets of men because nothing is hidden from God. We will be judged on that day according to our works because works demonstrate what you really believe.

If you say you have faith, but it does not produce works, it's not true faith, it's dead works. So, it's just, it's according to works. And thirdly, and most surprisingly, God's judgment is according to the gospel.

[12 : 10] Verse 16, on that day when according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. Judgment's part of the gospel.

And I think we ought to be very wary of any gospel presentation that avoids or minimizes the judgment of God. And it's integral to the gospel because we preach Christ Jesus, crucified, risen from the dead.

Do you remember when we began in Romans? On that day when God raised Jesus Christ out from among the dead ones, he sat him on the throne and he gave all power and judgment to Jesus Christ.

And he said today when Jesus will judge the living and the dead and if you proclaim the Christian gospel, you are proclaiming the name of the one who judges, that the end has already begun, that the one who saves is also the one who judges, that we cannot have salvation apart from judgment.

And the question you should be asking is why is Paul telling us this? I mean, have we come to church just to have our self-righteousness undermined?

[13 : 27] Yes, I know I'm a hypocrite. Now the question I've been trying to ask is what is God seeking? What does he want? I mean, he could have brought the judgment day 2,000 years ago.

He could have brought it as soon as he raised Jesus from the dead. Closed history, brought heaven and earth. The one reason he doesn't is because in his kindness he's wanting to lead us to repentance.

Look at verse 4 please. Or do you presume, this is speaking to the religious hypocrite, do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

That is what God is seeking. That is why we are hearing about his wrath. God is holding back the day of wrath because of the wealth of his kindness and generosity and patience.

He is delaying the day of wrath so that many will repent and escape the wrath. He is trying to lead us to turn our lives away from self-righteousness and self-centeredness and trying to play God Christ at the center and trust his righteousness and let him be God.

[14 : 53] Let me put it to you this way. God is blisteringly angry with evil and sin. But his wrath is not his natural work.

In the Old Testament God describes his wrath as his strange work, his alien work. It's the personal response of the righteous God to evil.

If there was no evil, if there was no sin, there would be no wrath. But the glorious riches of his kindness and love are who he is and who he was for all eternity and who he will be for all eternity.

So that the gospel tells us the plain truth about judgment and that the one who sits on the throne and in judgment on us at that day is exactly the one who came and stood in our place on the cross and took the wrath of God into himself that we deserved and offers us forgiveness, offers us repentance, and offers us his righteousness.

So that one day when we stand before God we may be clothed not in the mouldy rags of our own righteousness but in his pristine and perfect clothing of Jesus Christ.

[16 : 13] And God holds back his judgment and his wrath so that I might repent and I might stand in Christ not under his wrath but under his smile. but I have to warn you not to presume on his kindness.

If there's anyone who is hearing me when we stand there when you stand before him on that day if you have not repented if you haven't bowed down to Christ and taken his forgiveness you will have no excuse.

It is a very solemn thought. This is what God is seeking. He is seeking that we would all come to repentance. He's provided his son to bear his own wrath.

He's full of mercy and kindness. He's holding back that day he offers life and forgiveness. What possible reason could there be not to turn to him? There is none.

That is what God is seeking. Secondly and more briefly what are you seeking? Verse 6 I'm going to read verse 6 and drop down to verse 9.

[17 : 26] God will render to each one according to his works verse 9 there will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil the due first and also the Greek but glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good the due first and also the Greek for God shows no partiality.

So every individual who stands before God it doesn't matter whether they're Christian or non-Christian it doesn't matter whether they're Jew or Buddhist or Hindu or atheist we each one individually will stand before Jesus Christ and be judged according to our works.

and here is the question the most obvious question doesn't the rest of the book of Romans and the Bible teach that we are justified by faith alone?

Doesn't it teach that salvation is based on the gracious doing of God and not my doing? It's very important listen to this sentence Paul says we will be judged according to our works and not on the basis of our works.

Just look down over to the next page chapter 3 verse 20 halfway down the first column on 941 for by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

[18 : 58] Drop down to verse 28 we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law or down to chapter 4 verse 5 up on the next column to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly his faith is counted as righteousness.

Cannot be justified before God by works by what we do. we can only be justified by that perfect righteousness of Christ that we receive by faith when we turn to him in repentance but brothers and sisters the fruit of faith is good works.

The indispensable proof that your faith is in Jesus Christ and his righteousness is good works will flow out of your relation with Christ. What faith does is it brings us into Jesus into union with him and that changes us at the root of our being it affects our desires and our fundamental motivations and ambitions and we begin to hate sin and love righteousness and seek God's glory.

It doesn't mean you suddenly become sinless but it means we enter a life of repenting and growing holiness and that will show itself in ordinary works and that's why we be judged according to our works.

you might say my works are pathetic and you'd be right. They're always mixed with sin and selfishness. I mean truthfully my most God honouring thought is always corrupted by some form of sin or pride.

[20 : 45] I can never love God in this life as he deserves but I don't place my security or my confidence in my works because any work that we do has come from God in the first place.

It's his grace working through us. By my works I don't make myself any more acceptable to God. I'm acceptable to God based on Christ's righteousness.

But when God looks at us and he looks at our works which are done in Christ Jesus you know what he does? He forgives what's sinful in them and he recognises his own righteousness in them and he delights in us and he says well done good and faithful servant and then he heaps on us rewards that we don't deserve.

We have some paintings at home they're very precious to me. They were done by my two boys when they were very little. They are not much to look at.

If you look at it you can't tell whether it's a mountain or a moose and I supplied the boys with the paint and I supplied them with the paper and I encouraged them to paint and when they brought their paintings to me you know those bright eyes and I didn't see one blemish in those paintings.

[22 : 01] I thought they were perfect. They were covered by my love. I was so proud and delighted. The Christian life is not about trying hard and doing rules and being a moralist.

It's seeking to please our father and our works demonstrate at the deepest level what we're seeking. It's a question of seeking and there's a big contrast.

Look at verse 8. for those who are self-seeking on the one hand who do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness there will be wrath and fury.

Self-seeking is literally out of what you live your life out of, your motive. The word is used for people who seek political office, not for the public good but for private gain.

It's a way of describing a spiritual approach to life. And these people can look terribly moral and terribly successful, they can be religious and pillars of the community, have their photographs in the Vancouver Sun and be on the right boards and give big donations but at root what they're concerned is their own gain.

[23 : 13] And they disobey the truth. The truth of God's judgment and God's salvation isn't irrelevant for them, I've read, use it as a joke from time to time. They don't like talk of righteousness and they think repentance is for people who've really messed up their lives.

They disdain the love of God, they usurp his judgment seat and by their hard and unrepenting hearts, that's the key, they store up God's judgment. But on the other hand, verse 7, Paul describes Christians, to those who by practice in well-doing, doing good literally, seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life.

Paul is speaking about every Christian without exception. Do you recognise yourself in verse 7? He's not speaking about a sinless person, but he's saying that in the Christian, the driving motivation, the deepest desire is seeking glory and honour and immortality.

And glory is one of those very difficult things to pin down. It means either fame or splendour. And the wonderful C.S.

Lewis wrote a famous essay called The Weight of Glory and if you have that essay I encourage you to read it today. He said when he was a young Christian, glory had absolutely no appeal to him.

[24 : 42] He said I didn't want to be made famous above anyone else and I quote who wants to be a kind of living electric light bulb. But the key here is that these things come from God.

Glory, honour, immortality. See, let's just take fame for a minute. Paul is not talking about fame from the media or from your competitors or even from your friends.

It's fame from God. The driving force in the Christian life is to please God, to have God's appreciation and God's delight and God's approval and fame with God.

It is our joy in life to bring satisfaction and delight to God because what he thinks of us is infinitely more important than what we think of him. If you don't believe me, look at the last phrase in chapter two, speaking about the spirit Christian, Christian with the Holy Spirit.

He says his praise or her praise is not from man but from God. That's amazing. When we come to heaven, God will praise us.

[25 : 53] It's almost too much to believe. Fame with God is a real ingredient in the divine happiness. Lewis says to be loved by God, not merely pitied but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father his son.

Or take splendour, the shining side of glory. This is just too much. Just keep your finger in Romans 2 and turn over to chapter 8 for a moment. While I was off on my little break over the last year, I've meditated on verses 17 and 18 of Romans 8.

They've become very precious to me. Remember we're talking about the splendour of glory? Let's just dive straight into 8. 17. If children then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Same glory. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us.

text says to us. But in the Greek, it's enough. In other words, Paul is saying, when we come there, it's not just that we will see his glory.

[27 : 28] We will share it. We'll be flooded with it. It'll be revealed in us. See, in this life, whenever we experience real beauty, whenever we see something very beautiful, it's tinged with sadness because we're spectators.

We can't participate in it. But if you seek glory, the glory of God, it means that you'll be united with the beauty that we can see the most unimaginable beauty in the universe, that we will pass into it, that we will receive it into ourselves, bathe in it, become part of it.

Or as Jesus himself said in Matthew 13, the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of the Father. You may not feel very righteous.

But again, this is not about sinless perfection. It's about your direction. It's about what you're seeking. It's about the life of those who are repenting, about those who know we sin every hour and we quickly turn back to God in repentance and do good.

But the point is that in all our doing, we're not seeking ourselves so much but we're seeking glory, the glory promises. Good works are useless unless in them we seek glory and honour and immortality.

[28 : 47] It's like the Chilean rescue workers this week, last couple of weeks. They weren't just digging, they weren't just constructing scaffolds and completing the shifts so that they went home.

There was deep purpose in what they were doing. They were trying to rescue their brothers. And the Christian life is one of seeking glory and honour and immortality in everything we do.

And seeking is a hot word. It's a desire word. It's a word of passion and intensity and heat. And it's meant to jolt us out of being complacent or coasting.

It's possible to go to church, it's possible to do all sorts of religious things and go through the motions and not really seek for glory. And I've got to ask you, where does your time and your energy and your thought and your imagination go?

I mean, just this week, what was your driving passion? Was it glory? I mean, he's talking about our ambition and our aspiration. A week ago, I spoke to a friend who's working in a church overseas.

[29 : 50] And he said he gathered the parents of the youth group to talk to them about what was going on for their kids and every single parent, he said, was ambitious for their children academically and materially, but none of them were ambitious for their kids spiritually.

Those of you who are retired or nearly retired, are you using your retirement for glory? Is that what you're seeking? It'll look different for every one of us, but it's glory, this glory that God promises the driving force.

If you're middle-aged, do you dream about your nest egg or do you dream about glory? Those of us who are starting out, what are you praying for?

What difference would it make in what you do with your, the shape of your week, for example, if this is what you are seeking? I think the most amazing thing about this is in verse 10, where Paul says that God has promised to give us glory and honour and peace anyway, to every Christian.

He doesn't give it sparingly, he doesn't give it to the gold medal Christians, he doesn't give us according to what we deserve, he gives it simply because he wants to.

[31 : 15] Remember the parable Jesus told of the man who owned a vineyard, he went out and he hired workers to work in the vineyard. And some started at the beginning of the day and some started in the middle of the day and some started just before the final whistle blew.

And at the end of the day, the owner of the vineyard rewarded all of them exactly the same amount because that's what he'd promised. It's a picture of the goodness of God. All our good works are full of flaws, but in his generosity, he promises rewards that we could never earn for ourselves.

Glory and honour and praise. So as we stand back from this magnificent passage, do we see the kindness and severity of our God?

It's a massive goodness that God should reveal this to us beforehand, both the warnings and the rewards. I mean, the warnings of his judgment comes from grace.

He didn't need to tell us about this. The day of wrath is coming on all who will not repent, whether they know it or whether they believe it or not. But in his kindness, he keeps warning and he keeps seeking and he keeps holding back his wrath.

[32 : 30] He keeps the gate of paradise open and he keeps calling us to repent. And I think it's a tremendous kindness to us to tell us what's in store for us beforehand in terms of our rewards so that our imaginations might be fired with joy.

He will give eternal life and glory and immortality to all who repent and trust in Christ, to all who seek for glory and good works. He didn't need to tell us beforehand, it's going to happen whether we know it or not, but in his kindness he reveals it to us so that we would love righteousness, we would take ourselves to Christ, we would rest on him, we'd have joy and peace in believing that we'd seek glory and honour and immortality in all we do and we would long to have what he's promised us.

Amen.