

Righteous Anger

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 00] Well, if you'd like to get your Bibles, turn to Romans chapter 1. I've lived in Chatswood now for just over 13 years, and I can still remember vividly my first experience of moving to Chatswood.

One of those experiences was rain. Amazingly, rain for me was weird in Chatswood because it came from every direction.

My experience was rain always came from the west until I moved here and it came from any direction, unpredictably. Secondly, I noticed the noise never stopped.

Thirdly, I remember not being able to sleep well because it was so bright at night. I was wondering who had left lights on in the house. Light pollution is a very real thing, and it's a real thing in Chatswood.

It's not good for sleeping, but it is good if you want to go for a walk at night and you've forgotten your torch. The major downside is we miss something that is so glorious and spectacular.

[1 : 13] I have never experienced the wonder glittering night sky in Chatswood. Never. In 13 years, never seen it here at all.

You've got to go west to experience the wonder of the universe and to sense your smallness. I've never seen the Milky Way or a shooting star in Chatswood.

Every light I see in the sky in Chatswood at night is on track to land at Sydney Airport. Or it's on flashing the top of a building of a crane or something like that.

What makes the heavenly lights so bright is and so attractive is that it's set against the scene of the ink blackness of the sprawling universe.

That's what makes them stand out and so glorious. The night, the brighter the stars, and it's the same with the gospel.

[2 : 15] It's the same with the core message of the Christian faith. Last week, Romans chapter 1, verses 16 and 17, we investigated the Apostle Paul's thesis in a nutshell about the Christian faith.

Why is that so glorious and spectacular?

Why is that such great news? Why is receiving God's righteousness through Jesus Christ the only way to have a right standing with our creator God?

We get the answer to that in verses 18 through to chapter 3, verse 20. What we have here is a devastating critique of human nature.

It is a dark picture of humanity that shows us why we cannot earn, deserve, or attain righteousness ourselves.

[3 : 43] And yet it is against this spiritual backdrop of blackest night that the light of the good news of the gospel shines even brighter for us.

So you've got an outline that will come up on the screen. Three major points. I'm going to kick off with revealing righteous anger.

At the end of last week's text, it's as Paul's summary. His gospel nutshell, if you like, the heart of Christianity. He says, he writes here, I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.

First to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed. A righteousness that is by faith from first to last.

First to last. Now in the original language, verse 18 begins with the word for. That is, it's connected, deeply connected. It flows directly on from verse 17.

[5 : 00] The connection is showing us that the gospel is necessary. Not just simply to make us happy or in John Piper's words, to give us a ticket out of hell.

It is necessary because we have a big, big problem that needs to be resolved. And Paul's confidence, joy, and passion for the good news is resting on the assumption that all human beings,

apart from Jesus, are under the righteous, justified anger of their creator God. Without a clear understanding of God's righteous anger, then the gift of his righteousness to us in Jesus will never thrill us, will never empower us, and it will never transform us. God's anger against human sin is a settled, fair, right, and a present reality. In verse 18, we are told that God's wrath is being revealed. It doesn't say that it will be revealed, but that it is being revealed.

[6 : 36] It's a reality now. And so it prompts two questions. The why question and the how question.

Why is it being revealed and how is it being revealed? Verse 18 tells us that God is angry because of humanity's godlessness and wickedness.

Godlessness is a word that summarizes, if you like, a disregard for God and a breaking of relationship with him. Wickedness is a word that summarizes disregard for people and breaking relationship with people.

That is, it captures both our vertical and horizontal relationships. Mark chapter 12, verses 29 to 31 tells us the greatest commandment.

It's to love God, love people, vertical and horizontal. Verses 19 and 20 says that the breaking of relationship with God and with people is something that all of us are responsible for.

[7 : 46] Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them, for since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and his divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

So the beginning of verse 21 goes as far as saying that all human beings, everywhere and at all times, know God.

They know God. God has made himself plain to them since and in the creation of the world. God reveals a God of eternal power, a being of divine nature, a God to whom we are utterly dependent and completely accountable.

Now, creation doesn't reveal everything that we need to know about God. God is not. But it's not hard to conclude that if the universe is great, then there is something greater that is behind that universe.

It philosophically does not work to hold to the view that there is a spectacular universe that happened by accident.

[9 : 24] It does not philosophically work to say that a God of order does not exist, but to point to scientific evidence at the same time.

Scientific evidence works on the assumption of order and not chaos. But I'm not here to argue all those points.

Verse 18 says that we suppress that truth. If we suppress that truth, we will never understand who we are or why the world is as it is.

And so Paul says we are without excuse. As verse 21 says, every human knows God, but no human glorifies God or gives thanks to him.

That is, God's issue with humanity is not so much that we're rude and that we've got bad manners. You know, I'm really cranky with people because they forgot to say please and thank you and pardon me.

[10 : 36] It's not that. The issue is that we are glory stealers. We are glory stealers. We take what God has made and we pass it off as if it's our own.

Ours. Which really is another way of saying that we don't acknowledge our dependence upon our creator and we claim independence instead.

We live under the illusion that we call the shots and that we can decide what is right and what is wrong. What's interesting in these verses is what it says about how we practice this suppression of the knowledge of God.

We push it down. We hold it down. We are people made in the image of God and we are made to worship God. And when we reject God, we don't by nature stop worshipping.

We transfer our worship to another thing. That's what we do. We simply shift at the object of our worship. Have a look at verse 23.

[11 : 55] They exchanged. It's a key word here in this text. Exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

It's there again in verse 25. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served, created things rather than the creator.

So people are created for worship and if they don't worship their creator God, then they worship something else.

They don't stop worshipping. They just worship something else. There must be something which captures our attention, which shapes our hope and in which we put our security.

It becomes our centre of our being. This thing we must have for our sense of validation and for our worth and whatever it is, we serve it.

[13:01] You can generally tell what it is because when I kick it for you, you get angry. When someone challenges it in any kind of way, your response is an angry response.

We give ultimate affection to a created and a good thing rather than the God who alone is worthy of ultimate affection and ultimate worship.

Rather than worshipping the immortal, we worship what he has made. That's why he is angry against humanity.

But Paul also explains how God's anger is being revealed in the present here. Verse 24. Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts.

The two words sinful desires there in verse 24 comes from a single word in the original New Testament language which literally means an over desire.

[14:12] An over desire. That is, it means an all controlling drive and longing and passion. The main issue for us is not so much that we have desires for evil and bad things, but that we have over desires for created good things.

Over desires. Controlling passions for those things. We turn good, created things into ultimate God things. We go from good things to God things.

We just take an O out is what we do. They go from being good things to God things. And those good things, when they become God things, turn into being evil things, bad things, destructive things.

The worst thing that can happen to us is to be given what our hearts desire if it's not God.

As Oscar Wilde, not a Christian himself, summed it up well, when the gods wish to punish us, they answer our prayers. They answer our prayers.

[15:30] God's judgment on godlessness and wickedness is to give us what we want. And that ultimately is the picture of hell.

Every person who will be there will want to be there. It's what we have chosen for ourselves. Since our hearts were made to be centered on God and since he is our creator and our provider, the provider of our satisfaction and our significance and our identity, every alternative that we set our hearts on ultimately will not satisfy us.

God gives us over to whatever it is that we have exchanged worship of God for and we will worship and we will serve those things. They will control us because they are not God and they will control us because they are not God.

They will never satisfy us. They are created things. They are less than us and they will always control us. They will enslave us. We will always want more.

The tragedy of humanity of which I am one. I want you to be clear about this. I am deeply in this text. The tragedy of my life and your life and humanity is we strive for and we fail to find in creation what we could simply receive and enjoy from our creator.

[17:08] We suppress the truth which would free and satisfy us. But the tragedy is what the heart loves the will chooses and the mind justifies.

What the heart loves the will chooses and the mind justifies. Secondly revealing the consequences of sin until verse 24 Paul's been focusing on humanity's vertical relationship with their creator.

While not everything about him is obvious from creation he has made his presence and his power known in the fabric of what he has made. Sin is where instead of honouring him by living independent gratitude we suppress the truth and we give honour to created things.

But sin doesn't just ruin relationship with God it ruins everything else as well. Damaging our vertical relationships with God also damages our horizontal relationships with people.

As I said previously and I'll say it again the word exchanged is key in understanding what sin is in verse 23 and 25 we exchange the created God for created things we make those things our God instead that is what we have here is an upheaval of the created order this exchanging and

disordering of creation continues because of our fractured relationship with God it flows on from there and so in verses 26 and 27 because of this God gave them over to shameful lust even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones in the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another men committed shameful acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their error and this is one of the more controversial passages in the Bible it's the longest passage on the Bible on the issue of homosexuality let me say that more recently many have attempted to suggest that the historic traditional understanding of these verses has been mistaken for instance there is a suggestion that these verses refer to people who act against their own nature rather than the nature however there's a number of pushbacks against that the reference to unnatural relations in verses 26 and 27 is literally against nature against nature in the original language that is homosexual practice and I'm talking about practice here not orientation homosexual practice is a violation of the nature the created nature of God

[20 : 16] Paul does not here state these people exchanged their nature their orientation that is they're not going against their personal orientation the nature of their personal orientation but they are going against the nature of sexual functioning there is no reference here to natural or unnatural feelings it is to natural and unnatural function that's the reference and the context matters too Paul is outlining here a scathing critique of pagan society as a whole he's not referring here to the sexual preferences of some members of that society but society as a whole he's addressing human nature and not the nature of certain individuals he's not judging sexual immorality on the basis of an inner disposition of the individual but in accordance with biblical revelation on the natural functioning of humans from created order now some have suggested that the word nature here means convention meaning that it's against the generally accepted practice in certain times and certain places that is it's against the cultural practice of Paul's day and age so it's against the society's acceptance of it the reality is that is just a misreading of entire misreading of history he is arguing against homosexual practice not because it was accepted culturally unacceptable culturally then homosexual practice was acceptable practice in his day and age he is writing this letter from

Corinth sin city people had sex in the streets in broad daylight he is writing from here where it was both acceptable in Corinth and in the Roman Empire to have both a wife and your family and a homosexual lover at the same time openly another argument is that Paul is only referring here to promiscuous homosexual practice and not against long-term settled relationships long-term settled relationships homosexual relationships in the Roman Empire was also acceptable practice it was culturally acceptable and there is nothing in this text that suggests even for a moment that he only has certain practice in mind and not others Paul had access to language to distinguish between certain things and certain practices in his day access to language that

Greek philosophers like Plato themselves used to distinguish Paul doesn't use any of them here even though he had access to all of it all of it if he had certain practices in mind he could have easily had access to that language and implanted in the text and he doesn't as a cultured and travelled Roman citizen Paul would have been very familiar with long term stable loving relationships between same sex couples and yet that does not stop him here from identifying them as not the creator's intention for human flourishing Paul is saying here is a way in which God has in his righteous settled just anger for human sin given people over to over desires and to experience its consequences and that is how the end of verse 27 should be understood the reference there to due penalty for their error in verse 27 is just really simply the reaping of the results of exchanging God for a lesser thing which is a biblical definition of idolatry the due penalty for their error is the consequence of idolatry this means that whatever due penalty is in verse 27 it is not restricted to homosexual practice the due penalty stuff in verse 27 is not restricted to homosexual practice this is due penalty for all sin all human beings suffer the due penalty for the rejection of God and we carry it in our lives every day now the Bible is clear and I'm very mindful this is a politically charged subject and it's not just politically charged it is deeply pastoral and personal for many people including dear friends of mine the

Bible is clear both in the Old Testament and the New Testament that practicing homosexual sex as a settled unrepentant pattern of behaviour is indicative of an attitude of rejection of Jesus Lordship and according to 1 Corinthians 6 this leaves a person outside of his kingdom but hear me say this never ever outside of his reach of his mercy never now there's much more that could be said on this subject but I do want to make two observations lengthy observations firstly notice that the first thing

that Paul highlights in these verses is heterosexual sex is that all sex outside of a biblical definition of marriage in verse 24 is sin and he says that before he gets to homosexual sex in verses 26 and 27 that is both result in and are an outworking of

[27 : 29] God's giving over in judgment all forms of sex outside of a marriage covenant between a man and a woman are in view here not just some all are a form of exchanging God's good order and are therefore idolatry and all result in due penalty let me take this a bit further on this issue elsewhere in his letters Paul mentions other examples of idolatrous behaviour he doesn't just think of sex as idolatrous behaviour other examples of idolatrous behaviour for instance in Colossians 3 verse 5 he calls greed idolatry that is greed is an over desire for more more my sense of worth validation is in my bank accounts and my possessions that is greed is just as indicative of idolatry and a giving over as sexual immorality is

I'll go even further Galatians 4 verses 8 and 9 Paul addresses Christians who have been pagans before they became Christians in Jesus and who are now tempted to take on Jewish religious laws in order to be saved this is what he says formally when you did not know God you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods but now that you know God or rather are known by God how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces do you think do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again Paul's point there is that the seeking of blessing and salvation through biblical morality through religious practice is just as much of an idolatry as greed and sexual immorality we worship whatever we think will give us a sense of identity worth validation and a sense of fulfillment if we do not worship our creator

God then we will worship something else it could well be sexual gratification increasing our wealth and our possessions or practicing religion the point is none of these things and this is absolutely essential for us to get none of these things are more or less serious than the others this leads me to the second observation while I want to declare that homosexual practice is a sin with all sexual immorality as a sin it is not the worst sin it is not the worst sin all sexual immorality is sinful including you married men who are engaged in pornography it's sinful sexual immorality and

Paul will in a moment go on and list a whole bunch of sins in the following verses and he calls all of these acts wickedness that flow out of rejection of the truth of God so friends what I want to do here the line I want us to walk as a church is to have such confidence in God and his word that we call sin what he calls sin I do want to avoid the error of some churches possibly for some in a desire for relevance and to be welcoming and loving for those of the homosexual community and others and I embrace that idea but what they've done in that they have downplayed or denied the clear teaching of scripture on this issue I also at the same time want to avoid the error of those who take the Bible seriously on homosexuality but do so from a very self righteous way for them this is the sin that really matters they may not do it overtly and you may not do it overtly but they speak and live as if this is it this is the sin they do not seek to love and welcome gay people but they seek to love and get alongside their Hindu neighbours or their friends who are committing adultery or some other sexual sin Romans 1 is not doing either of those things here Paul is not saying it doesn't matter what you do

[33 : 18] God's okay with it so get along with it and be happy he's not saying that but he's also not saying what you do matters so much that I don't want to love you I don't want to witness to you and if you are somehow that's as if somehow you're beyond the gospel or that you're beyond God's mercy or you're beyond the welcoming and embracing of the local church can I say that you can always tell if the latter is ultimately your attitude because you will see sexual sin and in our day and age you will see homosexuality as a perversion but you do not see your gossip your greed your rampant materialism your slandering of another your anger you don't see any of those things a perversion you don't feel the weight of any of that how can you possibly think that one sin like sexual sin is a perversion but your impatience is justified in any way we do not have a hierarchy of sin there is no gospel breakthrough for any of us until we feel the weight of our sin not someone else's sin our sin and so that is the first step needed to break through to gospel hope and for a joy and freedom is to be confronted by our own sinfulness our own sinfulness we need to come to that place where we realize like the apostle

Paul in 1 Timothy 1 15 I I am the worst sinner I know me if you can specifically outline a history of people's sin against you but you cannot go clearly to your own sin and if one makes you angry and the other one doesn't break you you haven't yet had gospel breakthrough you're living in Chatswood with light pollution you can't see the glory of the stars if Jesus would come and die for

my sin then there is no one he would not die for I've already jumped into my third point seeing ourselves here that's my final point we see ourselves in this text

Romans 1 is not about some people it's about all of us one way or another verses 28 to 32 we have this unsettling list not an exhaustive list but an unsettling list of an outworking of idolatry it's the outworking of the suppression of the knowledge of God of not thinking it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God the list is an all encompassing list even if it's not detailed that is it includes economic disorder in verse 29 with greed in getting verse 29 social disorder with murder and strife and deceit and malice in verse 30 we family disorder with disobeying parents in verse 31 further relational disorder with senselessness and faithless and heartless and ruthless the point this all points to what is known here as historically the Christian doctrine of total depravity it touches everything it means that sin has touched every single part of who we are and everything that we do it doesn't mean that we're that human beings are as bad as they possibly could be because God's grace to all of humanity is that he doesn't just hand us over to the full extent of our sin he by his grace restrains so much wickedness hell is where he lets go and you're on your own right now we exist with the blessings of his gracious hand on our lives this here chapter is a dark view of humanity but it fits so well with the reality of the world in which we live every religion and system of thinking must account every religion and system of thinking including secularism must account both for the awesomeness of the universe and at the same time of the sorry the awesomeness of the universe the goodness of that human beings are so capable of and at the same time the brokenness of our world and our bodies and our lives and our hearts and our relationships holding both of those things in tension the scriptures the christian message has got a clear understanding of how those two things connect why is there so much beauty in this world and yet why is it so flawed the bible's answer is god god in the beauty of the world we are to see god's existence and in the brokenness of the world we are to see his justice this this this ultimately takes us to the cross both of those things take us to the cross of jesus christ where with both those things the ugliness and the beauty collide for the display of god's mercy towards us the ones who have rejected him this dark view of humanity in this text draws us into it every single one of us there is no them and us these verses blow away self-righteous pride if that doesn't do it for you then come back next week come back next week as the apostle paul turns his guns and does a devastating rebuke on the self-righteous those who are pursuing a self-righteous morality the religious you see the thing is self-righteousness

and if this is you at the moment let me just say self-righteousness is always without without failure it is always self-condemnatory always and it's the playing field of the moralist the gospel does not shine brightly brilliantly in our lives until we see the darkness of our hearts but this view of humanity must be read in the light of verses 16 and 17 and considering those verses we do we do not need to fear God's righteousness because we can receive his righteousness the gospel is the motivation and the freedom and the power that we need to stop suppressing the truth through idolatry and instead finding our greatest sense of satisfaction and worth and identity in him so that we might give God the praise and the gratitude that he deserves so let me swing this back around this church under my leadership seeks to be a safe place for everyone for everyone we are a hospital for rescued sinners none of us are more needed of that rescue than anyone else some of us are not just in the waiting room and some of us in ICU we're all in ICU all of us if you don't see that yet gospel breakthrough awaits for you where you can live with joy and freedom this gospel calls us to be a welcoming church for all people who are listened to with humility patience love but we are also a discipling community following

Jesus as our Lord this gospel calls us to be a welcoming community but not an affirming one of all positions and lifestyles and choices people can be a no 21 or them Budget school all in « » zost lo «