

ROMANS 1:18

Wrath of God (Part 3)

We are going to begin covering verses 18-32. In these verses a preacher will usually spend most of his time on two topics. First, God has revealed Himself to all people through his creation. Second, this text addresses ungodliness and homosexual behavior.

These are two very important topics and it would be tempting to jump right into a discussion of these topics. But homosexuality and ungodliness are not the main point of verses 18-32. We will get to that later but we have to see the main point Paul is making.

Beginning in chapter one verse 18 all the way up to the end of chapter three Paul explains that all people apart from Jesus Christ face the wrath of a holy God. In chapter one verses 18-32 Paul says that people who live ungodly lives face the wrath of God. God hates sin and he will punish sin. I think that is obvious to most of us. But what is not so obvious is that there are some very religious people who go to church and who seem to have their lives all put together, but they do not love God in their heart and they do not love other people.

Paul's point is that if you are living an ungodly lifestyle you face the wrath of God. But if you are a religious hypocrite you also face the wrath of God. In fact all of us no matter how poor or polished have sinned against a holy God. We all need God's grace. We all need to receive his gift of salvation. Let me illustrate this with a story of two people. The first tells the story of a religious person who did not understand where he really was in relationship to the wrath of a holy God.

STORY – I AM BASICALLY A GOOD PERSON

Many years ago I became friends with Joe. I became pretty close to Joe when I rented a room from him and I got to see his life up close. Joe was basically a good person. He attended catholic mass and gave money to people in need. He was a pretty good guy. Yeah, he swore and drank a lot of beer, but he was one of the good guys. When I talked to Joe about God's plan of salvation he was very closed off. He got the idea that there were some lousy people and there were good people and the good people went to heaven. And he thought he was one of the good people. He had it all worked out in his mind.

I asked Joe if he had even sinned against a holy God? Had he ever taken the Lord's name in vein, or had he even lusted or as a child had he even taken something that did not belong to him? I told him of Jesus' words that if we sin against one point of the law that we are guilty and could not go to be with a holy God because God does not leave sin unpunished.

Well, Joe did not buy it. He kept going back to the "basically good person argument." Yes he stole from someone and yes he got drunk and yes he lusted, but his religious pride would not allow him to see that he was guilty before a holy God. He was overall a pretty good guy but he did not think he was like "one of those sinners" who needed to be forgiven.

STORY – GOD WOULD NEVER WANT SOMEONE LIKE ME

And then there was Barb, a lady in her mid sixties who came to me for pastoral care. She told me that she had been into drugs and the occult for years. She had done so many things against God that she said God would never forgive her. She knew that God was holy and that she had sinned against a holy God. But like Joe she thought there were good people and there were bad people and she was one of the bad people destined for hell.

The sobering truth is that according to the word of God, Joe and Barb are exactly in the same position. Romans 3 tells us that all people have sinned and fall short of God's perfect standards. Whether it is religious pride or hypocrisy, or the neglect of the poor or drugs or occult, every one of us is in the exact same position. We have all sinned and we all equally face the wrath of a holy God. Every one of us stands in need of forgiveness.

After making the point in chapters one through three that we all need God's forgiveness Paul lays out the true plan of salvation based on faith in Jesus Christ and the forgiveness he offers to us through His work on the cross.

Let's begin our study of this section written to the irreligious. Beginning in verse 16 Paul writes,

For in the gospel a righteousness of God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith. For the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness."

When you hear verse 18 in its context, it is clear the one idea Paul is stressing in verses 18-32 is the wrath of God. I have not given too many fire and brimstone messages. But a true understanding of the wrath of God is crucial to our faith for several reasons.

1. We must understand the truth of God's wrath if we are going to understand the nature of salvation and the Gospel message.
2. The doctrine of the wrath of God is ignored by some or presented in a way that is biblically imbalanced.
3. The neglect or misunderstanding of the doctrine of the wrath of God has had a devastating effect on the church.

WRATH AND THE GOSPEL

There are many books written every year that talk about the mercy and grace and kindness and forgiveness and healing of God. But very few books are written on God's wrath. And the doctrine of hell is under attack and becoming very unpopular.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE WRATH OF GOD AS IT IS COMMONLY PRESENTED TODAY IS BIBLICALLY UNBALANCED.

Did you know that the most common theme of Jesus' teaching is judgment and hell? Thirteen percent of all his teaching is on those two subjects. Over half of Jesus' 40 parables relate to God's eternal judgment of sinners and in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus mentions hell three times.

I think Jesus spent a lot of time warning people around the wrath of God because he did not want people to suffer wrath or go to hell. In fact Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

It is a little spooky and unpleasant to talk about the wrath of God. If you aren't on some level repulsed by this topic there is something wrong with you. But the fact that this topic is unpleasant can in no way justify our avoiding it. The church is thoroughly imbalanced today and the results are all too evident.

THE ABUSE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE WRATH OF GOD HAS HAD A STRONGLY NEGATIVE EFFECT ON THE CHURCH.

We lack a sense of urgency for the lost.

Although we may believe in our head that God punishes sinners, we do not really believe this in our heart. That truth doesn't burn within us, as it should. If we really in our hearts were deeply convicted of the fact that God in His holy anger will send people to the fires of hell, then our urgency to share the gospel would be increased.

To put it another way, how can a person have a burden for the salvation of other people unless they truly understand what people are saved from? New Testament scholar Leon Morris says rightly, “*Salvation for Paul is essentially a salvation FROM as well as a salvation unto.*” A god, who has been de-clawed and de-fanged of his wrath, is a god who will probably find it in his big heart to somehow pardon our family and friends who aren’t true believers.

Do we see sinners through the biblical lens of God’s wrath? Do we understand how God views them? Let me give you just one biblical metaphor to help us see whether we view sinners through the lens of God’s wrath. In Revelation 19:15 Jesus is pictured on his return as the One who “treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.” Revelation 14:20 completes the metaphor. It says, “...and blood flowed out of the [wine]press...” Christ is pictured as the One who stands in the middle of a vat of ripe grapes and it is his weight, as he stands and walks on the press, which causes the grapes to ooze out their juices...their blood! How does that text represent the sinner? As the ripe grape under the heel of Christ!! The sinners who we meet and talk with every day are pictured in Scripture as fruit, which is ripening for the fire of hell.

Every day people live apart from Christ, they grow more and more ripe and when they are fully ripened, Christ harvests them and tramples them in his wrath. That is one way in which God views sinners--is that the way we view them--as ripening for the fires of hell? How can we have a burden for the lost if we do not understand what people will face if they are not born again?

Cheap Grace

Cheap grace is a second negative effect of failing to come to grips with the wrath of God. If sin doesn't make God angry, then Christians can agree with the facts of the gospel, but they will see total obedience to God as something that is optional. An important part of faith for any true believer is having a healthy, biblical fear of God. God, speaking to Christians said; ***Jeremiah 32:40, "...I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me."*** Do you hear the relationship between fearing God and not sinning against God? There is a direct correlation between the two. Having a biblical sense of God's wrath is indispensable in helping us to fear God, which, according to Jeremiah helps us stay obedient to God. Without a deep sense of the God who angers, cheap grace rushes in and before you know it, you have Christians who don't act a thing like Christ.

I have to admit that after doing this study of the wrath of God I dropped about a dozen bad habits instantly. When I really got a handle on how much God hates sin a holy fear and respect for God was rekindled within me.

The way we present the gospel

A third negative effect caused by this lack of emphasis on the wrath of God is seen in the way we present the gospel to others. There is a temptation when we share the gospel with others to tell them that Jesus can help people live more fulfilling lives, or put more spring in their step, or help them overcome bad habits and addictions. All those things are true and they are good. But we can't forget that the main blessing of the gospel is that it delivers a sinner from the wrath of a holy God.

The biggest problem faced by the sinner today is not that he is unfulfilled or unhappy or is bound by an addiction. The biggest problem any

of us could ever face is, to use the words of ***John 3:36***, “***the wrath of God rests on [them]***.” Is that the way we preach the gospel?

Is the gospel just God’s method of making people happy? Or is the gospel a message of good news that through Jesus Christ there is a way to escape the wrath of God? If people do not hear about the wrath of God, the gospel is just one more self-improvement method.

And if we really understood and believed the doctrine of the wrath of God we would be so grateful that God expressed His mercy toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Christ died for us so that the wrath of God would be satisfied. That leads us to our next point.

A lack of deep appreciation for God’s grace and mercy.

If we do not understand the doctrine of the wrath of God we can never have a deep appreciation for God’s grace and mercy. If you have a lukewarm, casual attitude about the wrath of God, you will probably have a lukewarm, casual appreciation of God’s mercy in the gospel.

And this is what we see today. When was the last time you wept and were broken over thoughts of God’s goodness and mercy to save you from the wrath you deserve? How can we appreciate our salvation, how can we have a biblical burden to share the gospel--how can we appreciate the mercy and grace of God in the gospel unless we first understand what we are really being saved from?

Jesus said it this way in ***Luke 7:47***, “***...he who has been forgiven little loves little.***” The opposite of that is also true-- “*he who has been forgiven much, loves much.*”

If we ignore the doctrine of the wrath of God, we will never be able to clearly tell people why they need to be saved and what they need to be saved from. And if we ignore the doctrine of God’s wrath we will never be fully

motivated to share the gospel with those who are perishing. And if we ignore the doctrine of God's wrath we will never be as completely grateful and thankful, as we should be that we have been saved.

Here is the gospel message stated in terms of God's wrath. Whether you are a basically a good person like Joe, or a mess like Barb every one of us falls short of God's standard of holiness and we deserve His wrath. We are saved from God's wrath when we say yes, I deserve the wrath of God but I want the wrath that was poured out on Jesus Christ on the cross to be the payment for my sin. I receive the payment of Jesus by faith to cover my sin.

Praise Jesus Christ for saving us from the wrath of God. Receive His payment for your sin today. Live a holy life. And save others from the wrath of God by sharing the good news that Jesus paid it all.

TAKING IT HOME

1. Do you have a sense of urgency to share the gospel with the lost? How does the doctrine on the wrath of God affect your urgency to share the gospel with other people?
2. Have you ever fell into a pattern where you found good excuses for disobeying God? How will the doctrine of God's wrath help you to hate sin the way that God hates sin?
3. Now that you understand the doctrine of God's wrath, how will you change the way you share the gospel message with other people? Do you understand that it is a good idea to talk about the wages of sin before you talk about salvation as the gift from God?
4. Now that you understand the doctrine of God's wrath, do you have a deeper appreciation for God's grace and mercy?