

Today's Sermon

God's Wrath and Our World

Romans 1:18-28

Pastor Phil Layton, GCBC, Jan. 16, 2021

INTRO: Story of college student asked "are you saved?" "...from what?"
How would you answer that question? How would many Jews in NT times?

TODAY: *Prosperity gospel* (saved from being unhealthy or unwealthy?
or saved from not having your best life now, from sickness, not sin?)
- *Psychological gospel* (saved from negative self-image, from low
esteem, saved from feeling bad or from not feeling fulfilled, etc.?)
- *Popular presentations* (God loves you and has a wonderful plan for
your life, God wants you to be happy, say this prayer and you're in?)

TURN TO ROMANS 1 – God's Word gives the answer and it may surprise. You might say we need to be saved from our sins, but Paul goes deeper. He goes beyond what we do, our biggest problem and what we need to be saved from is ... God. Are you saved? From what? From God Himself. His wrath.

¹⁸ *For the **wrath** of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.*
In the context of v. 16 Paul wasn't ashamed of this gospel of salvation for all who believe, but what's the salvation from? The wrath of God in v. 18. Paul wasn't ashamed to talk about the bad news of wrath. We need the good news of the gospel to be saved from what? From God and His wrath on sin.

2:5 *But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up **wrath** for yourself on **the day of wrath** when God's righteous **judgment** will be revealed ... [now look at v. 8] *but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, **there will be wrath and fury.****

That's our biggest problem, not sin, but the God who judges sin with wrath. Unrepentant self-seeking sinners are in the hands of an angry God and need to be saved from His fury. If that's you, you need to be saved from God and His day of wrath. If you're not obeying the truth, and aren't penitent, you're storing up wrath for judgment day. God is bad news ... good news: *but God.*

5:8: *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* ⁹ *Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be **saved by him from the wrath of God.*** That's what we're saved from: God's wrath. The only way to saved from God is by God – from God the Father's wrath at our sin, by God the Son's work for our sin.

God shows His wrath and shows His love at the cross. He's not only love, He hates sin. Sinners are His enemies. So He's our problem and only hope.

¹⁰ *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be **saved by his life**.* We're saved from God's wrath by the death and life of God the Son if we confess Jesus is Lord and trust His death and resurrection for us (10:9). Ch 2 calls it repentance, here it's reconciliation, enemies now made friends.

The Father's wrath completely satisfied, Jesus thank you, once your enemy ...

Go to ch 9, look at 9:22: *What if **God, desiring to show his wrath** and to make known his power, has endured with much patience **vessels of wrath prepared for destruction**,²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for **vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory** ...*

God desires to show His righteous wrath and also to make known the riches of His glory for those He gives mercy to, who He's prepared for glory. So saved from what? *From God, by God, and for God, for His glory* (11:36). Every NT book except one mentions wrath. Most of Rev 6-19 is about this.

Today we'll focus on God's wrath in Rom 1-2 but we need to see where the context is going. The bad news sets up the good (diamond on black velvet).

<p>Today's outline: 1) God's wrath, 2) man's sin, 3) gospel hope for change</p>
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Our new series is God's attributes (last week His jealousy by Pastor Corey).

2 weeks ago we looked at Rom 1:20, the only place in the Bible where the word 'attributes' is used. v. 20 talks about *eternal power and divine nature*. I want to stay in Rom 1 next week for the attribute of *righteousness* in v. 17. Today *wrath* in v. 18. I defined an attribute as a quality or a characteristic.

Some theologians define wrath and jealousy as characteristics of God, but not attributes technically, if attribute=eternal essence before creation, fall.¹

God is "holy, holy, holy," that's God's essence, wrath is an expression of it.

Think of wrath as His attitude toward sin, not an attribute before sin came.

The Bible says '*God is love*.' There has always been love within the Trinity, before the world or any wickedness existed. That's essential and eternal--He would cease being the God who is love if He ever wasn't love. But the Bible doesn't say '*God is wrath*.' After the world fell in sin, God revealed wrath, but in eternity past when it was just the Trinity, God was God with no wrath to anyone. Wrath isn't essential to His eternal nature like love, it's not part of v. 20's *attributes* of His '*eternal...divine nature*,' it's an aspect of God's holy righteousness revealed at sin. We'll study that more next week in v. 17

Joel Beeke's *Reformed Systematic Theology*² says wrath 'is an attitude of God's unchanging holiness... Strictly speaking, wrath is not an attribute of God's nature, but is his holy justice against sin... theologians must walk a tightrope, maintaining a balance of truth when describing the wrath of God ...we must not view [it as] passion

of rage, as if God were an abusive tyrant ... Someone also might object that if God hates sin and never changes, then he must have been eternally angry before any sinner existed. Here we must remember that wrath is not precisely an attribute of God, but an exercise of righteous love... the activity of his [unchanging] righteousness ... true theology roots God's wrath in his love by recognizing that genuine love must hate evil... wrath is an aspect of his jealousy, which is not an eruption of unstable passion, but... springs from his zealous love for his Son.'

Think of a father when his kid is being harmed, or a judge sentencing

Or think law enforcement, deadly force as they protect and serve (13:4-5). We also need to think of it on 2 levels: God's future wrath vs. present wrath.

Rom. 2:5 talks about future wrath, '*the day of wrath...*' (end times, eternal).

Rom 1:18 is about present wrath, '*the wrath of God is revealed*' (pres tense)

1:18 *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.*

In the present tense, men keep suppressing truth and wrath is now revealed.

ILLUSTATIONS: suppressing truth of wrath, hymnal changing Getty lyrics

Boy smuggling dog into room, hiding it in toy box and sitting on it as father comes in, but he can't keep down the evidence

Do we suppress the truth of wrath? Are we ashamed, v. 16?

Steve Lawson writes if we hold back the truth of God's wrath 'We reduce His love to syrupy, sentimental mush and turn Him into a user-friendly god who pats us on the head instead of delivering us from condemnation.'³

Francis Schaeffer: 'There is no real preaching of the Christian gospel except in the light of the fact that man is under the wrath of God'-*Death in the City*

Jesus preached more on hell than heaven; and wrath than love, Jn 3:36

We looked last time at v. 18-23 and how suppressing truth about God leads to idolatry, not just statues but gods can be a job, power, money, sex. Today in v. 24-28 we'll see how wrath comes in immorality and depravity, and the hope of the gospel that can change us. Next week v. 29-32. Now listen as I read for how relevant God's wrath is to our world. Rom 1 explains what's going on in America. The Bible is more up to date than tomorrow's news. This is how God's wrath is revealed to a society that suppresses God's truth and doesn't honor Him as God or give up thanks, His wrath gives them up.

²⁴ Therefore **God gave them up** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. ²⁶ For this reason **God gave them up** to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men

and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. ²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, **God gave them up** to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. The NASB has 'God **gave them over** to a depraved mind.'

This takes us from point #1, God's wrath, to point #2, man's sin

Remember this all flows out of v. 18, this is how God's wrath is revealed on those who suppress His truth and substitute God with things of this world in their affections and attention. They give themselves over to sin, and a point comes where God gives them over. This isn't just a sinner, it's a society, it's '*them/they*' in this passage. God in wrath giving up or turning over to sin a society. This isn't future wrath, it's present tense, a wrath of abandonment.

This isn't a prophecy of NorCal, but it is a picture of a nation under wrath. Any society that lives out v. 18-23 follows this pattern. I'd argue it's not that God *will* judge America--God *is* judging America in the sense of this text. v 24-27 isn't just a biblical story of ancient Rome, it's also a biography of the modern U.S. as God's wrath is revealed. ²⁴ *Therefore **God gave them up** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,* ²⁵ *because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie*

...

A lie like 'it's ok to lust in my heart, or have impure thoughts,' or 'if it feels good, do it,' or 'it's ok as long as you love each other,' or 'you can do what you want with your own body-and if you get pregnant-what's in your body.'

God's wrath is revealed as His truth about morality is suppressed, and He's been giving up America verse by verse, decade by decade. It started in v. 24 with the sexual revolution. Some of you may remember on 'I Love Lucy,' when the word 'pregnant' was off limits for television. Or Ozzie and Harriet and their separate beds (how she ever got pregnant, who'd know in 1950s)?

But in the 1960s-70s the sexual revolution was given over to lust, impurity, adultery, pornography, and God's truth about intimacy within marriage was exchanged for the lie of immorality (and lie of abortion that it's just a tissue)

²⁶ *For this reason **God gave them up** to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men ...* Next step is the LGBT revolution, lesbian, gay in that order. In the 1980s-1990s the movement grew. Media and internet fanned the flames that rage now, consuming opposition. No shame, except shaming Christians.

Another translation of v. 26 *God **abandoned** them to their shameful **desires**. Even the women **turned against the natural** way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. ²⁷ And the men, instead of having **normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other**...* (NLT).

In v. 20 creation shows God's divine nature, but here they exchange that for what's contrary to nature and the way their body was created. God designed body parts and hearts for marital intimacy of male and female. But in v. 21 they didn't honor God so He gave them over to dishonorable desires. Same sex attraction / passion / burning lust for someone of the same gender is part of God giving over. It's not just deeds, it's desires that degrade and depart from how we're made, Ladies first in this list, but normally women are last in a society to give in to certain sins. In ancient writings, lesbianism was far less common, but as God abandons in wrath, ladies lead the LGBT parade.

In 1997 Ellen came out of the closet on TV and the approval ratings of that show were off the chart. In 1998 Bill Clinton's approval rating went up with his sex scandal (10% higher). In biblical law, adultery deserved the death penalty, but as the law found our nation's president guilty, approval of him went up. The 20th century ended like this chapter ended: ³² *Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give **approval** to those who practice them.*

Now we have LGBT-affirming groups or LGBTQA, A=allies

The sins of v. 28-31 have been growing like crazy in the 21st century, even in the riots and anarchy of the last year and a half, it's textbook Romans 1. We'll look at those last few verses next week, but this is America verse by verse and decade by decade. The train starts with truth-suppressing, idolatry and ingratitude in v. 18-23. Heterosexual sin and homosexual sin follow and approval is the caboose. The train is going faster and all brakes are now off.

If you don't give approval, you're off the train (or out of a job)

Just 10 years ago, Barrack Obama said he believed marriage was between a man and a woman only, but if you say that today, you're cancelled for life. His view later evolved, but truth doesn't evolve. God's wrath is revealed as we suppress His truth and don't honor Him, and He eventually gives us up to our desires and lets a nation go the way it wants. He lifts restraining grace to say 'have it your way.' Wrath before final wrath says 'your will be done.' One of the greatest proofs today that the Bible is true is Rom 1 (testimony). But are we powerless to change this? Is there power to change from sin?¹⁶ *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...* [including 'religious people,' and also pagans]

Including heart lust in v. 24, and serving anything other than God in v. 25

We've seen 1) God's wrath, 2) man's sin, now 3) gospel hope for change

There's good news, that's what gospel means, good news. Bad news is all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and the wages of sin is death. But there's grace greater than all our sin, grace that can save and change us!

We planned this series months ago, but this is more timely than I could plan. This month in N. America, state and national governments are suppressing the truth of God that those are sins deserving wrath, or sins God can change. I got an email this week from a biblical counseling center in Indiana that is being threatened with fines of \$1,000 a day for counseling based on this text for those who want to turn from homosexuality to the hope of gospel change

In our State, there's much heat on Christian colleges who believe Rom 1

In Canada this month, **'conversion therapy' for homosexuals is now a crime**. I don't believe *therapy* converts, but their new law says it's a myth that gays can convert. That new law may affect parents or pastors or personal counsel. So last Sunday many Canadian churches read this statement: *'We recognize that the greatest danger facing the Canadian church is not that we might face criminal prosecution, but rather that we might compromise in our teaching of the Word of God or fall silent in our proclamation of the gospel. Along with church leaders of like conviction across Canada, we stand before you today to pledge that we are committed to obeying God above all others (Acts 5:29). With the Lord's help, we will continue to proclaim the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) without fear or favour. This includes God's life-giving design for human beings, made in His image, male and female (Genesis 1:27), with sexual intimacy reserved for the covenantal union of a man and a woman (Genesis 2:24). We will continue to issue the call to repent of all kinds of sin and to believe the gospel, knowing that we all have sinned (Romans 3:23), and that salvation through Jesus is the one true hope for the world (Acts 4:12). We will continue to love and serve all people in our community, without distinction, in Jesus' name. As we press on in the work of ministry, we will trust our Heavenly Father to guard us and keep us, and to work out His greater purposes for our good and His glory.'*⁴

Many churches in America on this Sunday are joining our brethren up north preaching on biblical sexuality. I stand with them, and I join praying for our governments, and pleading with the Lord to have mercy on N America. I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God unto salvation – that means deliverance from sin. The gospel is God's power to change us.

1 Cor 6 mentions idolaters and adulterers, the immoral and the homosexual, *'such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified'* (v. 11). You can be changed, purified, by the Lord Jesus and the Spirit of our God. 1 Cor 6:11 says to the church that's what some of you were, it's not what you are, it's not your identity. Unholy desires and deeds can be made holy, that's what it means to be sanctified. God has power to wash, cleanse, and change. Same sex attraction may not go away, but there's grace to resist temptation.

The book of Titus says *'Once we, too...became slaves to many lusts and pleasures... but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new*

birth and new life...He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people' (3:3-5, 2:14 NLT). Your sin isn't your life or your identity. In Christ you have a new identity and a new life with a new nature. Your sin doesn't define you, who you are is in Christ

If you're in Christ by faith in Him, PTL He '*has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus ... who delivers us from the wrath to come*' (1 Thess 5:9, 1:10). Your discussion guide question #6 asks how God's wrath should affect us as believers? We should PTL we'll never face His eternal wrath because Jesus bore the wrath so we stand forgiven at the cross. The Father's wrath completely satisfied, we say Jesus thank you.

How should we pray as we see God's present wrath revealed in our world? Like the prophet, '*in wrath, remember mercy*' (Hab 2:4). Or like the Psalms '*rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath... who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you? So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom*'⁵

How should this affect how we evangelize unbelievers? 2 Cor 5: *Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men...we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God (v. 11, 20 NKJV). Flee to Christ, flee the wrath to come. "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains..."*⁶

I'll close with Rom 2:4, it warns not '*presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance...*' This is question #5 on your note sheet, if God's kindness, how is it important for us to reflect God's kindness in helping people repent of the sins in Rom 1? Rosaria Butterfield was a liberal lesbian teaching queer studies, but the kindness of a Christian man and his wife was what God used to lead her to repentance. On the back of your note sheet, I list her book at the bottom *Secret Thoughts of An Unlikely Convert*. I pray some of us here show God's kindness to lead some in LGBT sin to repent

Recommended reading by Christians saved out of that lifestyle:

Rosario Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of An Unlikely Convert*

Jackie Hill Perry, *Gay Girl, Good God: The Story of Who I Was and Who God Has Always Been*

Rachel Gilson, *Born Again This Way: Coming Out, Coming to Faith, and What Comes Next*

Christopher Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God*

How to Speak About Sexuality and Homosexuality As a Church

From Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?* p. 149-150

Here's **10 commitments** I hope Christians and churches consider making in their heads and hearts, before God and before a watching world:

1. We will preach through the Bible consecutively expositionally that we might teach the whole counsel of God (even unpopular parts) and to avoid riding hobby horses (even popular ones).
2. We will tell the truth about all sins, including homosexuality ... if we are speaking to strugglers who fight against same sex attraction, we want to be patient and sympathetic.
3. We will guard the truth of God's word, protect God's people from error, and confront the world when it tries to press us into its mold.
4. We will call all people to faith in Christ as the only way to the Father and the only way to have eternal life.
5. We will tell all people about the good news of the gospel, that Jesus died in our place and rose again so that we might be set free, saved from the wrath of God, welcomed in the holy city.
6. We will treat all Christians as new creations in Christ, reminding each other that our true identity is not based on sexuality or self-expression but on our union with Christ.
7. We will extend God's forgiveness to all those who come in brokenhearted repentance, everyone from homosexual sinners to heterosexual sinners, from the proud to the greedy, from the people pleaser to the self-righteous.
8. We will ask for forgiveness when we are rude, thoughtless, or joke inappropriately about homosexuals.
9. We will strive to be a community that welcomes all those who hate their sin and struggle against it, even when that struggle involves failures and setbacks.
10. We will seek to love all in our midst, regardless of their particular vices or virtues, by preaching the Bible, recognizing evidences of God's grace, pointing out behaviors that dishonor the Lord, taking church membership seriously, exercising church discipline, announcing the free offer of the gospel, striving for holiness together, and exulting in Christ above all things.

¹ Gerald Bray, *The Attributes of God: An Introduction* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021): 'Wrath is the way disobedient people experience God's justice, but it is not a divine attribute. If it were, God would be angry with everybody all the time ... Wrath is an expression of his righteousness, as Paul makes clear in Romans 9:19-24 ... This is not the result of some inner divine nastiness but the inevitable application of justice to creatures who have provoked him and invited their own demise ... jealousy and wrath [in some 20th century works on the attributes] would appear to be innovations in a list of divine attributes, though they are certainly characteristics of the God of the Bible' (p. 24, 83, 104).

Mark Jones notes 'we must be exceedingly careful when discussing this attribute ... when the Scriptures speak of God as angry or jealous, we must understand these emotions as metaphors ... God's anger remains an expression of his outward will, not his essential being.' *God Is: A Devotional Guide to the Attributes of God* (Crossway, 2017), 193

² Volume 1, p. 854-58.

³ Steve Lawson, *Made in our Image*, 125.

⁴ <http://www.freedomsummit.ca/>

For more on this, see <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/columns/ad-fontes/bill-c-4-history-concerns-and-response/>

⁵ Psalm 38:1, 90:11.

⁶ John 3:36.