

Condemnation: The Need of God's Righteousness

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1. In our last time together we were introduced to the letter to the Romans.
2. We saw the big picture to this letter and then zoomed in on chapter 1 as well as verse 1.
3. We learned in verse 1 that Paul was the author of this letter.
4. We also learned some background information about him like his original name was Saul and he didn't start using the name Paul until Acts 13:9.
5. He was born in Tarsus, educated in Jerusalem by Gamaliel and he had a trade of tent making.
6. Because he was a first class legalist, he was a persecutor of the church.
7. He believed that those who followed Jesus were attacking the Mosaic Law.
8. But in Acts 9, on his way to persecute Christians in Damascus, he was saved.
9. This was completely unexpected.
10. ***Now before we move on, I gave an assignment from Acts 9.
11. ***You were to tell me what happened to Paul.
12. Now we didn't stop there in looking at Paul.

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13. We also saw his relationship to Jesus.
14. He said in verse 1 that he was a slave, an apostle, and set apart for the gospel of God.
15. We also noted that this was part of his greeting in the first seven verses.
16. We also saw in chapter one, vv.8-15, his thanksgiving for the believers at Rome and his desire to visit them.
17. And then we came to verses 16-17 where Paul declares the theme.
18. Does anyone remember what the theme of this letter is?
19. Paul says in **Romans 1:16-17 (NASB)** ¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."
20. The "gospel" is the theme and that's what we see throughout this letter to the Romans.
21. Before we concluded our study last time, we also saw in 1:18-3:20 that this section addressed the condemnation of the unrighteous Gentile, Jew, and Humankind and reveals the need of God's righteousness that each person has.

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22. My goal tonight as we return to this study is to look at 1:18-3:20.
23. Again, it contained three sections: 1:18-32 (unrighteous Gentiles), 2:1-3:8 (unrighteous Jews), and 3:9-20 (unrighteous humankind).
24. Let's begin our study tonight at 1:18-32.

I. Unrighteous Gentiles (1:18-32)

The text before us is foundational to our understanding of God's revelation of the gospel.

Notice the abrupt change in the tone of the epistle from verses 1-17.

Paul has just introduced us to the revelation of the righteousness of God, but no sooner does he mention it than he introduces another revelation—the wrath of God.

R.C.H. Lenski says, “God has made two revelations: one of his righteousness in the gospel, which is salvation and life; the other of his wrath from heaven, which is damnation and death. The one is “from faith to faith” and deals with “everyone believing,” the other is “upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,” etc.”¹

Look at verse 18:

Romans 1:18 (NASB) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1936). 89–90.

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R.C. Sproul says, "I am sure that the apostle introduces the wrath of God at this point because no one can fully appreciate the good news as good except against the backdrop of our guilt before God. The good news is an announcement to people who universally are under the indictment of God and exposed to his wrath.

People today are not particularly concerned about the gospel because they do not know anything about the law of God, and they are not at all familiar with the revelation of his wrath. If people were sensitive to the manifestation of God's anger toward them, they would be so moved by enlightened self-interest that they would flee as fast as they could to hear the gospel, but their necks have become so hardened, their hearts so calcified, that they have no fear of God. People do not believe in God's wrath; they think he is incapable of it. They listen to preachers everywhere tell them that God loves them unconditionally, and when they hear that, they see no reason to fear his wrath."²

Regardless, Paul says...

A. God's Wrath is Revealed (v.18a)

What is God's "wrath?"

² R.C. Sproul, *Romans* (Kindle Book). Location 563-73.

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First it is not an impulsive outburst of anger aimed capriciously (randomly) at people whom God does not like.

The “wrath of God” is the settled, determined response of a righteous God against sin.³

This is “divine” wrath.

Paul says it is the wrath “of God.”

So it is therefore unlike anything we know of in the present world.

God’s wrath is not like human anger, which is always tainted by sin.

God’s wrath is always and completely righteous.

He never loses His temper.

The Puritan writer Thomas Watson said, “Is God so infinitely holy? Then see how unlike to God sin is. ... No wonder, therefore, that God hates sin, being

³ John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997).

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so unlike to him, nay, so contrary to him; it strikes at his holiness.”⁴

Paul says, “for the wrath of God is *revealed*.”

is revealed. More accurately, “is constantly revealed.” The word essentially means “to uncover, make visible, or make known.”

God reveals His wrath in two ways:

1) indirectly, through the natural consequences of violating His universal moral law, and

2) directly through His personal intervention

(the OT record—from the sentence passed on Adam and Eve to the worldwide flood, from the fire and brimstone that leveled Sodom to the Babylonian captivity—clearly displays this kind of intervention).

The most graphic revelation of God's holy wrath and hatred against sin was when He poured out divine judgment on His Son on the cross.

God has various kinds of wrath:

⁴ John MacArthur, *Romans* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996). 62.

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- 1) eternal wrath, which is hell;
- 2) eschatological wrath, which is the final Day of the Lord;
- 3) cataclysmic wrath like the flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah;
- 4) consequential wrath, which is the principle of sowing and reaping; and
- 5) the wrath of abandonment, which is removing restraint and letting people go to their sins (for examples of this wrath, *see notes on Ps. 81:11, 12; Prov. 1:23–31; Hos. 4:17*).

Here, it is that fifth form, God's abandoning the wicked continually through history to pursue their sin and its consequences (vv. 24–32).⁵

B. God's Wrath is Against Men Who Suppress the Truth in Unrighteousness (v.18b)

Verse 18 says that God's wrath is "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

⁵ John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997).

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God's wrath is not like the wrath of a madman who strikes out indiscriminately, not caring who is injured or killed. Nor is it like the sin-tainted anger of a person who seeks to avenge a wrong done to him. God's wrath is reserved for and justly directed at sin.⁶

Notice that Paul isn't talking about two kinds of sin.

Asebia (**ungodliness**) and *adikia* (**unrighteousness**) are synonyms.⁷

All ungodliness is also unrighteousness, and vice versa.⁸

He is saying unrighteousness results from ungodliness and it is product of men who "suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

⁶ John MacArthur, *Romans* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996). 66.

⁷ John MacArthur, *Romans* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996). 66.

⁸ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1936). 92.

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The idea of ungodliness refers to a lack of reverence for, devotion to, and worship of the true God—a defective relationship with Him (cf. Jude 14, 15).

Unrighteousness refers to the result of ungodliness: a lack of conformity in thought, word, and deed to the character and law of God (*see note on 1:17*).⁹

The point of what Paul is saying is you cannot have one without the other.

When Paul speaks of ungodliness and unrighteousness in verse 18, he is referring to two distinct things taken together to point to just one thing.

God is angry—furious—with a particular sin. When we examine that sin, it is seen to be both ungodly or irreverent and unrighteous or immoral.¹⁰

Sin is the only thing God hates. He does not hate poor people or rich people, dumb people or smart people, untalented people or highly skilled people. He only hates the sin that those people, and all

⁹ John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997).

¹⁰ R.C. Sproul, *Romans* (Kindle Book). Location 573-94.

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others, naturally practice, and sin inevitably brings His wrath.¹¹

The word “suppress” (Κατέχειν) means not merely “to hold” (A. V.) but “to hold down,” thus to suppress, to prevent the truth from exerting its power in the heart and the life.

The truth is not merely quietly held while men go on in immorality, for it is the nature of truth to exert itself, make its power felt; it is held down so that it shall not exert itself.¹²

Every person is naturally inclined to follow sin and resist God.

This phrase could be rendered, “who are constantly attempting to suppress the truth by steadfastly holding to their sin.”

¹¹ John MacArthur, *Romans* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996). 67.

¹² R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1936). 92.

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Unrighteousness is so much a part of man's nature that *every* person has a built-in, natural, compelling desire to suppress and oppose God's truth.¹³

So the single sin that provokes God's wrath against the whole human race is the sin of suppressing the truth.¹⁴

What truth is being suppressed? Paul tells us: because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them (v. 19).

The truth that every human being suppresses is the truth of God, what God reveals of himself in nature to the whole human race.

This is not the truth of God that we learn through the Bible. We suppress that too, but here Paul is writing of a truth that is known about God apart from the Bible, a knowledge of God that God makes manifest.¹⁵

C. God's Wrath is Revealed As Divine Abandonment
(vv.24-32)

¹³ John MacArthur, *Romans* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996). 67.

¹⁴ R.C. Sproul, *Romans* (Kindle Book). Location 573-94.

¹⁵ R.C. Sproul, *Romans* (Kindle Book). Location 595-618.

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In vv.24, 26, 28 God's wrath is seen as a divine abandonment.

The phrase "God gave them over" appears in each of the three verses.

We see the wrath of God is revealed by God giving men over to uncleanness (1:24), to vile affections (1:26), and to a reprobate mind (1:28).¹⁶

**Last week I asked you to be prepared to talk about this phrase. What does it mean?*

R.C. Sproul says, "We hear all the time about God's infinite grace and mercy. I cringe when I hear it. God's mercy is infinite insofar as it is mercy bestowed upon us by a Being who is infinite, but when the term infinite is used to describe his mercy rather than his person, I have problems with it because the Bible makes very clear that there is a limit to God's mercy. There is a limit to his grace, and he is determined not to pour out his mercy on impenitent people forever. There is a time, as the Old Testament repeatedly reports, particularly in the book of the prophet Jeremiah, that God stops being

¹⁶ William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

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gracious with people, and he gives them over to their sin.

The worst thing that can happen to sinners is to be allowed to go on sinning without any divine restraints.

At the end of the New Testament, in the book of Revelation when the description of the last judgment is set forth, God says, “He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still” (Rev. 22:11). God gives people over to what they want. He abandons them to their sinful impulses and removes his restraints, saying in essence, “If you want to sin, go ahead and sin.” This is what theologians call “judicial abandonment.” God, in dispensing his just judgment, abandons the impenitent sinner forever.¹⁷

Notice the results of God giving them over to their sin.

vv.24-25 tells us “they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.”

vv.26-27 says “their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same

¹⁷ R.C. Sproul, *Romans* (Kindle Book). Location 760-81.

way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.”

vv.28-32 says “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, ²⁹ being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; ³² and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”

Paul doesn't leave the Jew without excuse. Now in 2:1-3:8 he addresses...

II. The Unrighteous Jew (2:1-3:8)

Paul begins **Romans 2:1 (NASB)** Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.

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Paul continues his somewhat relentless indictment of our sinfulness: Therefore you are inexcusable, O man (v.1).

In light of all that he has just spread out before us of the universal rejection and suppression of God's manifest self-revelation, which everybody knows with clarity, and in light of God's eternal power, deity, and holiness, the sins people practice are worthy of death.

People not only continue to practice these sins, but they encourage others to do so.

Therefore, man is without excuse.

We might think that the "O man" is a generic address to any human being, but it was a common form of address in antiquity used between Jews.

When Paul uses "O man," he is clearly addressing Jewish people.¹⁸

Notice how Paul begins verse 1.

He begins with the word "therefore."

This refers to what he has just said in the last half of chapter 1, and specifically to vv.18-20.

¹⁸ R.C. Sproul, *Romans* (Kindle Book). Location 934-53.

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William Barclay says, “In the foregoing passage Paul had painted a grim and terrible picture of the heathen world, a world which was under the condemnation of God. With every word of that condemnation the Jew thoroughly agreed. But he never for a moment dreamed that he was under a like condemnation. He thought that he occupied a privileged position. God might be the judge of the heathen, but he was the special protector of the Jews. Here Paul is pointing out forcibly to the Jew that he is just as much a sinner as the Gentile is and that when he is condemning the Gentile he is condemning himself. He will be judged, not on his racial heritage, but by the kind of life that he lives.”¹⁹

As already noted by the designation “O Man” in v.3 to be referring to Jews, verse 17 makes it even clearer to say that the “you” in verse 1 are the “Jews” in v.17.

We could say that this is another group of moral people.

The first group did what was right in their own eyes, rejected God and He abandoned them to their sin.

¹⁹ *The Letter to the Romans*, ed. William Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 2000). 40–41.

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This second group focuses on the upright, moral, and religious person who has a sense of right and wrong and leads an outwardly virtuous life. This would also include the professing Christian.

Paul's says they also have "no excuse" (v.1).

In that "you judge another, you condemn yourself" because you obviously have a criterion by which to judge, meaning that you know the truth about what is right and wrong before God.

Even the Gentiles know the basic truth of God's "eternal power and divine nature" through natural revelation (1:20). They also have a sense of right and wrong by conscience (2:15).

The Jew, however, not only had both of those means of knowing God's truth but also had the great advantage of having received His special revelation through Scripture (3:2; 9:4).

Not only that, but almost all Jews of Paul's day would have known something of Jesus Christ and of His teaching and claims even though they would not have believed He was the promised Messiah.

Such knowledge would have made them still more inexcusable, in that their greater knowledge of God's

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truth would have made them more accountable to it (see Heb. 10:26–29).²⁰

So God's judgment "falls rightly upon those who practice such things" (v.2) and you will not escape it (v.3).

Your "stubbornness and unrepentant heart" is only causing you to store up "wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (v.5).

Until then, realize, verse 4, it is "His kindness and tolerance and patience" that leads to repentance.

God is impartial.

He will judge both the Gentile and the Jew.

He will "render to each person according to his deeds" (v.6).

If you are one who "by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life" (v.7), there will be "glory and honor and peace" (v.11).

But "those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness" (v.8), there will be

²⁰ John MacArthur, *Romans* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996). 113–114.

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“wrath and indignation” (v.8) and “tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil” (v.9).

He concludes by stating in vv.12-16, “For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; ¹³ for *it is* not the hearers of the Law *who* are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. ¹⁴ For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, ¹⁶ on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.”

Paul further shows how the Jew is without excuse in 2:17-3:8. Because he has the Mosaic Law, it is that very Law that condemns him.

In other words, when we look in the mirror of the law, every one of our blemishes becomes instantly obvious.

We cannot hide from what the law reveals about who we are.

No wonder Paul speaks of the law as the schoolmaster that drives us to Christ.

R.C. Sproul gives some very insightful thoughts at this point in our study. He says, “Can we not extrapolate the critique that Paul gives to his kinsmen, Israel, and apply it to today’s church? We rely on the Word of God and on our doctrine. We are confident in our calling as guides to the blind, as lights to those who are perishing in darkness. We instruct the foolish; we are the teachers of infants. We have the form of knowledge and truth. Elsewhere Paul rebukes people for having a form of godliness but lacking the substance of it (2 Tim. 3:5). The outward form is there, but that form is an empty shell, and once God bores through that shell and examines the heart beneath the external form, there is no internal reality. That is the judgment that Paul is giving to Israel, but it also has application to us.”²¹

This is why it is important to use the Law of God in our presentation of the Gospel.

This is exactly what Paul is doing here.

He has already condemned both the Gentile and Jew as being under sin.

III. The Unrighteous Humankind (3:9-20)

Now He says in **Romans 3:9-20 (NASB)** ⁹What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already

²¹ R.C. Sproul, *Romans* (Kindle Book). Location 1115-44.

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charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; ¹⁰ as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ¹² ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." ¹³ "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; ¹⁴ "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS"; ¹⁵ "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, ¹⁶ DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, ¹⁷ AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." ¹⁸ "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES." ¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; ²⁰ because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin.

Then in 3:21-5:21 he gives the gospel which is the provision of God's righteousness.

So in 3:9-20 Paul continues to drag us before the law.

The beginning of Romans 3 continues the bad news, but the good news is within striking distance.

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Law and gospel both have their place in the Christian life.

By the deeds of the flesh, by the law, nobody is saved.

Salvation comes only through the gospel, but if we ignore the law, we will never feel the weight of our need for the gospel.

CONCLUSION

1. Do you see why the wrath of God is revealed to all those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness?
2. Do you see how everyone one is guilty and under sin unless they are justified.
3. We will look at the subject of justification in our next time together.

***Your assignment for next week is to write out the 10 commandments and answer the following questions:
Am I a good person? Have I kept the 10 commandments? Have I ever worshiped other gods? Have I ever taken the Lord's name in vain? Have I honored my mother and father? Have I ever murdered anyone in my heart? Have I ever committed adultery, even in my heart? Have I ever stolen anything? Have I ever lied? If you were judged by the Ten Commandments, do you think you would be innocent

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or guilty? Do you think you would go to heaven or hell?***

4. Let's pray.