

Romans

August 30, 2009

Romans Chapter Two

This is the fifth lesson in our series on the Book of Romans.

The Theme of the Letter

Romans 1:16-17

“For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power** of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the **righteousness of God is revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ ”

Title: “There Is No Partiality With God”

While I make no claim to personal brilliance in my understanding of the Book of Romans, next to John’s Gospel I have, perhaps, spent more time in Romans than in most of the other books of the Bible.

When I do not make a direct attribution of a thought to its author, I am usually presenting a coalescence of the thoughts of William Hendriksen, Curtis Vaughn, Douglass Moo, Geoffrey Wilson, Martin Lloyd-Jones, and James Montgomery Boice, among several others.

The key to understanding the Book of Romans; yes, the very Gospel itself, is to grasp the fullness of the phrase , “the righteousness of God.” The “righteousness of God” is God’s way of putting men right with Himself.

The Gospel is the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ alone! Can you see what Martin Luther saw, “... The just shall live by faith”?

And sad to say, in our day it is necessary to further qualify justification by faith by saying, “faith alone.” The Roman Church says that justification is by faith; but they will not say by faith alone! And the Roman church is not the only ones because many of our Baptist brethren ascribe saving faith to a “decision” based on man’s so-called “free-will.”

Paul, after declaring that the **righteousness** of God is **revealed** { 17 } in the Gospel, he immediately declares that the **wrath** of God is **revealed** { 18 } [in conscience and in nature] against ungodliness and unrighteousness. Paul then gives the evidence of the wrath of God in man’s rejection and suppression of the truth of God that may be known.

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First the article: “The Wrath of God”

“God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him” (Nahum 1:2-6 KJV)

Even Christians who are firmly convinced of the authority and inspiration of the Scriptures tend to minimize, or explain away, descriptions of the wrath and vengeance of God such as Nahum presented here. While it may not be appropriate to use such passages when first approaching people with a view to persuading them of the truth of the Bible, eventually there comes a time when we cannot avoid the question of how God’s wrath and vengeance are related to His love. Pursuing these connections requires thought, courage, and a willingness to come to know God as He is and not as we might wish Him to be. Conversion to the faith of Christ is not simply a matter of “asking Jesus to come into your heart.” It involves a *metanoia* (the NT word for repentance), which means, literally, a “change of mind.” In other words, becoming a believer involves adopting a new worldview, or perspective on reality.

The modern Western world view has blurred distinctions between right and wrong, and within such a perspective there is no place for the wrath and judgment of God. But when one’s perspective changes, and it becomes evident that God is a moral force to be reckoned with, then it becomes equally apparent that serious consequences ensue for those who attempt to live without regard for His plan for human life:

Romans 1:16-17

“For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power** of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the **righteousness of God is revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ ”

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Romans 1:18-32

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man — and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for the 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 vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, 30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; 32 who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

NKJV

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“God’s wrath is not an uncontrollable, destructive emotion directed against those God dislikes. Wrath describes His just, holy response to sin and rebellion. From human perspective shaped in a world permeated by sin and injustice, wrath and love are seen as polar opposites. In God, however, there is no conflict between His great love and His terrible wrath. Most human beings know that something is wrong with the world, and there is a deep longing that it be put right. The multiplicity of religions and sects give a variety of explanations of why the world isn’t as it should be. They also prescribe a variety of logically incompatible solutions to right the wrongs. Both God’s love and His wrath are the guarantors

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that what is wrong will be put right. To deny or minimize God's wrath is to obscure what He revealed in the death of His Son who bore God's wrath in our place."

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The downward spiral of man's depravity includes suppressing the knowledge of the truth, idolatry, and finally in rebellion against one's own nature in homosexuality. I tried to make it clear that while sodomy is an abomination to God, that the sin of sodomy is no more condemning than the other sins that Paul lists in his "catalog of sins," vs 29 & 30.

The wrath of God is revealed by God giving up those who persist in holding down the truth to a reprobate [rejected, not approved] mind.

"Although men know God [in Creation], they are practical atheists at heart, and that by choice. There is a difference between the knowledge, and the acknowledgment of God; the pagans knew God, but would not acknowledge him."
{Matthew Henry}

Paul employs a play on words in 1:28.

"As they *did not approve* of fully recognizing God any longer, God gave them up to minds that He *did not approve*." The word translated "debased" NKJV could be "reprobate". Originally the word was applied to metals which failed to pass the assayer's test. Here a "reprobate mind" means a mind of which God cannot approve, and which must be rejected by Him, this being the effect of refusing to have God in their knowledge."

{Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words}

Chapter One ends with verse 32 making the assertion that all agree that God will judge sin and yet they sin and approve of the sin of others!
So we have examined:

The Wrath of God Upon the Pagan World. {1:18-32}

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We will now take up the subject of:

The Wrath of God Upon the Jew {2:1-3:8}

We will break this subject into four parts:

- Part 1: 2: 1-11 the impartiality of God's judgement.
- Part 2: 2: 12-16 the universality of man's accountability to God.
- Part 3: 2: 17-29 the Jew fails to live up to his privileges.
- Part 4: 3: 1-8 the unbelief of the Jew.

Part 1 deals with; **the impartiality of God's judgement** 2: 1-11.

After establishing the Gentiles' need for the righteousness of God in the Gospel of Christ; Paul turns to the Jew, and shows that they too have failed to attain a righteousness that is acceptable to God.

Chapter Two is reminiscent of the story of Nathan and David.

We are ready to make a judgment of the sins of others and the Holy Spirit through Paul is going to tell us that all of us are guilty.

Cf. 2 Samuel 12:1-14 & Matthew 7:1-6

2 Samuel 12:1-14

And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.

²The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: ³But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. ⁴And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. ⁵And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: ⁶And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

⁷And Nathan said to David, **Thou art the man.** Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; ⁸And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.

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⁹ Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD , to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. ¹⁰ Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. ¹¹ Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun.

¹² For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. ¹³ And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD . And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. ¹⁴ Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.

Matthew 7:1-6

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

² For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. ³ And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? ⁴ Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

⁵ Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

⁶ Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

In 2:1-16, the charge is veiled.

The Jew, as indignant as was David, is confronted {7}:

“Thou art the man!”

The moral person says, “I should be acquitted on the grounds that I am not as bad as some other people.” The refutation of that plea is: “You do the same things, perhaps in a more sophisticated way.” All who deserve to be judged will be judged.

Francis Schaeffer: Suppose you had a tape recorder around your neck;
you will only be judged by your words:
“He shouldn’t do that.” But then you do it too!

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2:1 Therefore you are inexcusable, O man,

The Jew, here represents the moral person. But to stay with our exegesis, do not let the application to the moral person deflect the emphasis that Paul here places on the Jew. The Jew had privileges and a superior moral code. Instead of living by this morality, they tended to become critics of the pagans. Now the Jew must be made to see that he himself does not escape the wrath of God. In a strict interpretation of this passage, Paul is addressing the Jew. And keep in mind that Paul was a Jew, a Pharisee, he knew the mind of the Jew.

The Jew actually believed that because God had favored them above all other nations, that they were safe from the judgement of God. Paul says the Jew is in no better position than the Gentile pagan. But the typical Jew was not an idolater, nor a homosexual. Ah, but go back to 1:18.

“... all ungodliness and unrighteousness...”

The argument:

1. You Jews give assent to the righteous judgement of God { 1:32 } and then you judge others for the sins they commit.
2. You Jews are equally guilty of sin.
3. Therefore, you condemn yourself and are, like the Gentiles, without excuse.

2: 2 “We know...” in principle;
“... the judgement of God is **according to truth...**”

The reality is that God judges according to true moral conditions.

Some people have a problem with the judgments of God in the Old Testament. Entire cities were destroyed: men, women, babies and cattle. Men have called the God of the Old Testament a “bully.” Be very careful how you assign your value system to what the Bible reveals as acts of God. It is very dangerous to presume to be the judge of God! Adam agreed with the devil that it was unreasonable that God denied to him the fruit of every tree of the Garden of Eden. My own brother was angry at God because his twin son was born retarded. I can give you many examples of men and women who have quit God because they charge God with unfairness.

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When I am confronted with a seemingly incompatible concept about God's providence I try to remember that God is Holy, and God is right. God is not to be measured by some standard of justice, He is the standard of justice!

We tend to judge by our own standard, by what we think is right. Many people justify sin in their lives, by rationalizing that their situation is different than that of other people. "God will understand that my situation is unique," they say.

William Hendriksen gives an illustration of how we make judgements:

"I'm six feet tall," said the little boy. His dad asked him how he had arrived at that conclusion. He said, "I found a stick as big as myself, and I divided it into six equal parts, and called each part a foot. That makes me as tall as you are: six feet."

We are all guilty of measuring others by our own measuring rod. The result is often a favourable estimate of ourselves, and a too harsh judgement of others.

2: 3-4 Two rhetorical questions point up the attitude of the unbelieving Jew.

vs 3 implies an emphatic NO answer!

vs 4 says they treat God's goodness with contempt.

The absence of certain sins in our life does not constitute a single virtue.

The presence of a single sin, in thought or deed, condemns us.

The goodness of God is not meant to lead us to self-satisfaction, but to conversion and to repentance.

2: 5 No more implied accusations; now a direct charge:

Instead of repenting, they become obstinate and store up wrath for the day of judgement;

Cf. 2:16. {Cf. Acts 17:31; John 5:27}

The Man Jesus, who is God, is the Judge of all!

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2: 6 Two important aspects of God's judgement:
It is universally applied to all men;
It is according to works.

We will this lesson next Sunday if the Lord so wills.