

## The Wrath of God

Romans 1:18-20 (09/16/12)

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Romans 1:18-20: <sup>18</sup> *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,* <sup>19</sup> *because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.* <sup>20</sup> *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.*

A double decker party bus with 65 teens was heading toward the George Washington Bridge from New Jersey several Friday nights ago. The teens from Queens, New York, were celebrating someone's 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. The vehicle boasted 15 big screen satellite TVs, 100,000 songs on demand, and a large dance floor on the first level. On the second deck a security person warned the partiers three or four times, "Don't open the escape hatch on the ceiling." It became warm up there so he went down to ask the driver to hit the AC. That's when he heard screams of horror from the second level. Sixteen year-old Daniel Fernandez had opened the hatch and stuck his head out just as the bus was going under an overpass. The party was over. Daniel was pronounced dead at the hospital. This was a tragedy, and family and friends continue to mourn Daniel's death. A clear warning was given, but ignored. This morning we're going to give clear warning about something far more sobering.

Last week we saw Paul was not ashamed of the gospel. He understood the gospel is the power of God for salvation. He proclaimed the good news that we receive God's righteousness by faith alone in Christ alone. *I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.... For in it is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, the righteous person shall live by faith.* Romans 1:16-17

You would think that Paul, after introducing us to this good news, would launch into reasons why this gospel will help us feel better about ourselves, pump up our self-esteem, make our lives happier, give us a boost and lift, help us cope, solve our emotional problems, tell us about our best life now, show us how to be healthy, wealthy, and prosperous. But Paul wasn't Joel Osteen or Robert Schuller. No, God in vs. 18 holds court with all mankind, and Paul, as God's prosecuting attorney, launches into a three-chapter indictment of the human race. The reason people yawn and ignore the gospel is because they aren't aware of the black thunderclouds of God's wrath hanging over their heads. They are like passengers in an airplane ignoring the flight attendant as he explains what to do in case of emergency, that is until a deafening explosion rocks the plane and it begins a rapid descent. Now the passengers are attentive! Don't lift that escape hatch, or there will be eternal consequences! Pay attention!

### **HAVE YOU HEARD THE CLEAR WARNING ABOUT GOD'S WRATH? Vs. 18**

*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.*

You may not have heard much about God's wrath. It isn't a popular subject. It isn't a pleasant topic. But here we are in Romans 1 and the subject of God's wrath is before us. It is time to deal with it. God tells us His wrath is right now, present tense, being revealed from heaven. Remember this – God's righteousness is being revealed in the gospel. And the reason you and I need this gospel is because God's wrath is also being revealed or unveiled, uncovered. How?

### **EVIDENCES OF GOD'S WRATH**

All of history is a demonstration of God's wrath, beginning in Genesis 3. The moment Adam sinned, BAM! Adam died. That's God's wrath. It didn't take much – just a little piece of fruit.

You see it at the flood, when God destroyed the entire world of evil people. Sodom and Gomorrah are a continuing witness that God hates and punishes sin. Throughout the Old Testament the fire of God flashed out at times and consumed some of His own people as well as Israel's enemies. The Canaanites faced the wrath of God for their homosexuality, incest, and sacrificing their babies to the gods. God's wrath was unleashed on the Jews through the Romans in AD 70. These are all fair warnings.

We know something of the wrath of God in our own consciences when we sin and sense that sharp pain of God's gavel coming down – guilty! We also see it today as God judges us by removing His restraints and giving us what we want, so we slide faster and faster into a pit of godlessness and moral depravity. You'll see this in verses 21 and following. We are not evolving; we are devolving under the curse of sin and our own depravity, sinking into greater and greater corruption under the wrath of God. If we're going FORWARD, it's over a cliff! This fall's TV show "The New Normal" is not progress. It's evidence of God's wrath turning us over to our ungodliness.

In the tribulation period the wrath of God will be poured out on this planet. People will cry and scream in agony, but will refuse to repent. Revelation 6:16-17, *And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?"*

Of course, there is a future aspect of God's wrath that will come upon all sin and evil. The lake of fire will be the eternal aspect of God's wrath, where sin will be punished forever. Revelation 14:9, *And another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.*

Ephesians 5:5-6 and Colossians 3:5-6 both give us fair warning that God's wrath is coming on all sin. Paul writes, *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.*

But God's wrath is most evident at the cross, where in His love for sinners God unleashed His wrath on His own Son. If you haven't taken refuge in the cross, now is the time to do it. Only through the cross will you escape the wrath to come.

#### GOD'S WRATH REVEALED FROM HEAVEN

God's wrath is being revealed from heaven. Why "from heaven?" Because God's wrath is the personal, sovereign, direct working of God on this planet and it includes everywhere and everyone on the planet. No one will ever escape the wrath of God unless they flee it and run to the cross of Christ. God is both revealing His wrath and saving believers from His wrath. If this truth about divine wrath and eternal hell wasn't in the Bible, I'd be a fool to preach it. But since it is in the Bible, I'd be a traitor not to preach it. Like the congregation's response to the preacher who told them he no longer believed in hell, "Well then, you can leave. If you're right, we don't need you, and if you're wrong, we don't want you. Either way, there's the door."

#### IS GOD'S WRATH JUSTIFIED?

God's wrath is revealed against what? Against "all" ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. That is all inclusive. Not a speck of sin goes unpunished. And then Paul identifies exactly what angers God. Ungodliness and unrighteousness. Ungodliness is our God-ward rebellion – we do not love God with all our hearts; we love ourselves. Unrighteousness is our man-ward sins, all the sins of attitude, thoughts, words, and actions that offend God's standard of holiness and attack other people – our lies, bitterness, anger, pornography, lusts and passions. Notice,

ungodliness is first, then unrighteousness. When people lose the fear of God they quickly slide into unrighteousness.

So, is God right to be angry with our sin and judge it wherever it is found? We just sent "Curiosity" to Mars. Curiosity is to drill holes into the rocky surface of Mars. NASA scientists are hoping the rover doesn't find water. Why? NASA engineers mounted one extra unsterilized drill bit in case the others didn't work. But NASA has a Planetary Protection Officer named Catharine Conley whose responsibility is to make sure no earthly microbe contaminates Mars.

Now listen. God is perfectly holy. God tolerates no contamination. And God is just. Wherever there is sin or the slightest microbe of evil that violates His perfect holiness, He reacts to it in anger and wrath, indeed, furious anger and wrath. He doesn't sweep anything under the rug and no one pays Him off. You would not want a God who isn't just or doesn't punish sin. We all have that God-given sense of justice. We are outraged over four murders in the American consulate in Libya. We want swift justice. Imagine if some beast of a man grabs your daughter and horribly abuses her and ends up torturing and murdering her and God said, "Hey, I'm not a judgmental God. I'm a tolerant God and love everyone. I'm sure he's got some reason for his behavior. No problem." That is not the kind of God you would ever respect and fear!

But back to that little word "all" ungodliness and unrighteousness. That includes yours, and mine! God's wrath is not unjust. God will never punish anyone wrongly. Have you had fair warning?

#### SUPPRESSION OF TRUTH

We may wonder what Daniel Fernandez did with the three or four warnings. Did he suppress them? Was he tipsy? Was he showing off? Was it a dare? For some reason he suppressed the truth of the security guard's warnings to the point of ignoring the warning. That's exactly what God says you and I do. We suppress the truth we know about God and our sin. The word "suppress" pictures a large beach ball full of air that you try to push down into the water, but it keeps popping up again. We try to suppress God's truth. We try to deny that we are sinful. We have developed all kinds of ways to ignore or deny or suppress God's truth in our life. We push it down, but we can't escape ourselves! Freud's psycho-analysis was an effort to get rid of those guilty feelings from our "super-ego." We'll look for preachers who tickle our ears instead of telling us the truth.

I understand this suppressing the truth. I was there. I remember trying to convince myself that this whole God idea was someone's big joke. But inside, I was worried. What if I'm wrong? And why was I so determined to try to explain God out of existence? So, have you had clear warning about the wrath of God? It is being revealed right now in so many different ways.

#### **DO YOU REALIZE GOD HAS GIVEN YOU MORE THAN ENOUGH EVIDENCE THAT HE EXISTS? Vss. 19-20a**

*Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made.*

#### GOD IS YOUR TEACHER

Here's why we suppress God's truth – we can't escape it. You can deny gravity, but don't jump out the 15<sup>th</sup> story window. We have to face the reality of God and if we don't, we're fools and guilty of doing the very thing God condemns us for right here. The evidence of God...that He exists, that He is real, that He is the Creator...is constantly before our eyes. And I want you to see this: God is your Teacher. It is God who is making Himself evident to you.

#### GOD TEACHES YOU ABOUT HIMSELF THROUGH CREATION

How has God made Himself evident? How do you know about God? Creation! The created order! Hebrews 11:3, *By faith we understand the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*

How important is the doctrine of creation? It's foundational to the gospel. How deadly is evolution? Evolution says that the very thing God is using to teach us about Himself (creation) all happened by time and chance with no ultimate purpose or personal Designer. Evolution is a direct attack on the God of the Bible and is one of Satan's most effective weapons of deception. It's a theory of desperation to avoid the reality and truth of God.

Look at these words – evident, things made, clearly seen, understood. Look around you. Everywhere you look, you are looking at the glory of God. God is making His glory plainly evident every second of every day. He just keeps putting it right there in front of our eyes and in our minds. "I made that. I made that." John Calvin wrote, "Wherever you cast your eyes, there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of His glory." A July Fox News article entitled "13 Incredibly Lucky Earth Facts" said earth is just the right distance from the sun (nothing colder than minus 128 or hotter than 136 F), rotates so one side doesn't burn up and the other side freeze up, and has a magnetic field protecting us from cosmic rays and solar storms, not to mention all kinds of meteorites. Then there is the whole green thing of photosynthesis converting sunlight, carbon dioxide, and water into plant food. And there are a bazillion more amazing facts, all of which have with nothing to do with luck. It's God. He made all that!

I am always fascinated by our lachrymal glands, those little eye wash reservoirs above each eye with seven or eight openings that drip fluid into your eyes. You never have to go to Auto Zone for refills. Then you've got wipers to swish back and forth to remove the dirt, and if that wasn't enough, a drain in the bottom of your eye for the dirty water to run into your nose so you can blow it out! You didn't make that. Chance had nothing to do with that. God made that!

What does this grand display of God's glory tell us about Him? Paul mentions two things. He is eternally powerful. Only an omnipotent God could create this vast domain. And He must be eternal in nature. He couldn't have begun sometime. Otherwise He'd have had to create Himself, and nothing creates itself. Ex nihilo, nihil fit – out of nothing, nothing comes. Plus, creation clearly shows that this powerful Creator is God. The entire universe exists from one Divine Being.

### **DO YOU THINK YOU WILL HAVE AN EXCUSE TO ESCAPE GOD'S WRATH?**

Vs. 20b, *So that they are without excuse.*

Here is the kicker in this whole thing. You and I are absolutely without excuse. We deserve His wrath. He has revealed Himself in nature as omnipotent and self-existent. The knowledge you learn from creation about God will not save you, but creation holds you accountable to seek God. No one can say, "But God, if only you would have shown yourself to me. If only you would have spoken directly to me."

If you are wise, you will flee this wrath and come to the cross, where God's wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness was poured out on Christ instead of on any sinner who is willing to believe the gospel.

We are clearly warned, taught by God Himself about His own existence, and therefore without excuse. Let's conclude with these four lessons from this passage:

1. Hate sin – God does and His wrath proves it.
2. Fear God – He isn't playing games. It's a fearful thing to fall into His hands without Christ.
3. Thank Jesus for paying this penalty of divine wrath in your place if you are trusting in Him.
4. Weep for and love and talk to lost people about both the wrath of God and the gospel.