

WHERE THE WRATH OF GOD BEGINS

Romans 1:18-32

INTRODUCTION:

The date was July 8, 1741 in a pulpit in Enfield, Mass. A most famous sermon in all of history was being preached. Standing in the pulpit was a weak, frail man, with poor eyesight - holding a full manuscript of his sermon. Reading in a slow and deliberate manner to a full congregation.

Before the service was over, however, one of the greatest - perhaps the greatest single revival in the history of colonial America had broken out. There was shouting, weeping, and fainting. People fell to the back of the pews to keep from falling into the depths of Hell. A fellow pastor tugged at the coat tails of the preacher - pleading Mr. Edwards, is not God also merciful.

The preacher was Jonathan Edwards. The sermon - Sinners In The Hand Of An Angry God. He forcefully portrayed the wrath and the judgement of God. He pictured God with the archer, with his bow drawn. The arrow aimed at the sinner's heart. He portrayed the sinner as an ugly spider hanging by a single thread over the flames of Hell. You say such preaching certainly would not go today. Hell fire and brimstone preaching is not popular today. It was not popular then.

Probably you say, that preacher was an unlettered preacher and that the congregation was an ignorant congregation. No, the man was judged as one of the most brilliant men that ever lived. He later became president of Princeton University. And it was a cultured congregation.

This man was preaching on the significance and eternal theme on the wrath and judgement that was inescapable, that God had upon sinful men. This is a note that is often missing in our preaching today. Nevertheless, it is the reality of the Scriptures.

We read earlier where Paul writing to the Roman Christians, in which he describes the judgement of God. The King James says the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness.

Now (this evening), I want to talk to you about this side of God. We can talk about God's love. The nature of God is love. But let us see, the other side of God's wrath as well.

Tell it like it is

God brings an indictment against mankind through the words of Paul. And he says that this judgement will be shown forth and revealed from Heaven.

V. 18 - It is against ungodliness and unrighteousness.

(Ungodliness) is a vertical relationship - a sin of attitude. Ungodliness is being alienated from God.

(Unrighteousness) is alienated from man. Wrong doing toward man. And they are related. Paul says they are cut off from God in ungodliness. Then we are cut off from our fellowman by unrighteousness. So ungodliness and unrighteousness form the tap root of all sin. And the basis of God's judgement and wrath against us.

V. 19 - What more could God do?

Paul gets specific and he brings at least three charges here against the

society of that day.

I. HE INDICTS THEM WITH CHANGING THE GLORY OF GOD INTO IDOLATRY - V. 23

Instead of worshipping the glorious ever living God, they had made wood and stone idols for themselves. They were worshipping these things they had made and not God.

Now if somebody from outer space, from the moon or mars, should come down and visit our culture today - our homes, our churches, and make some observations before leaving -- I wonder if they would observe that the earth creatures are idolatrous. They worship idols. You would be greatly upset. You would call that a false and ridiculous charge. You would say we have churches, we have religion, we are godly people. But idolatry is the worship that which is created instead of the creator. This is the charge against us. And this is what Paul placed as an indictment against those people.

Let me suggest three or four idols which we worship today.

- ✓ 1. There is science. I think this is an idol in our day. We can go to the moon. We can make our homes like summer in the winter time. We can make it like -- cool it in the summer. We can apply science and make life really wonderful. We have actually come to worship a god called science. Deep in the hearts of people, there is the belief that science is going to deliver man from every one of his problems. We do not face a single problem but that man's mind, through applied science, cannot bring in a utopia. And in a heaven ultimately a salvation.

What do the thinkers say? Oh, they say that man will over come his problems. Look what he has done. Look what he has made in the energy crisis. Man is going to solve this problem.

2. There is the idol of materialism - the god of things. This gets right down to where we live. I think Paul writes, he says, you say you don't pray to idols. And then you make money your God instead. Our gods are those which claim our first interests, our first emotion, our first loyalties. Men and women are bowing down to a dollar and worshipping it. They bow down to a business, they bow down to a house which they make their home. They bow down to the physical furnishings they have in their home. The care of it. This gets to be idolatry.

3. There is the god of humanism. Some say the great flaw in human nature is, the god almighty within us. The desire is that I am god almighty. Now let me get a little power. Let me get a little bit of this authority. And the god power that is within me will drive me forth.

Now this is reflected in our attitude toward the wrath of God. Toward Hell, toward the idea that God will judge us. Our forefathers believed in judgement. They painted graphic pictures of a man standing before a judgement bar of God. The great judge was seated at the judgement bar. They used to think of the day when they would stand before God and be held accountable.

That is not so with modern man. That does not apply to us today. When you talk about the great judgement day and the appearing before the judgement seat of God - the response is, so what.

That is tomorrow. I don't believe those religious figures. And they smile about the judgement bar of God. We have reversed the position. We put ourselves on the judgement seat, and God standing down here. We say, I am going to decide whether or not I want to take Christ - I'll decide. Whether or not I really want to believe in God - I'll judge whether or not I want to believe in the doctrines of the church. I am the judge. That is, the God almighty in me is saying that I am a human being - I am God.

The ⁴fourth idol is sensualism. Which has captured this day. Now this is the animal nature in man that must be satisfied.

V. 24 - This is living, we say. This is the full end of life. This is the goal - the end of all existence. We have here a great craving for recreation. And playing, and partying. Life goes faster and faster, and faster. And we seek the sensual satisfaction of life to the exclusion of the mental and the spiritual.

That is the first indictment and the first charge. They have changed the glory of God into the idol of worship, science, materialism, humanism, sensualism.

II. THE TRUTH INTO A LIE - V. 25

They exchanged the truth of God for a lie. This is the second indictment.

Instead of believing what they knew was truth about God, they deliberately chose to believe lies. This is a heresay today. The Bible says, in the beginning was the word. The word, the revelation of God - Jesus Christ, he was revealed to us in this Bible. We can find this from Genesis through Revelation. This is the revelation of the word of God. Yet today, men change this living truth revealed to us through Jesus Christ, and they put it aside, for lies.

An outstanding man at the head of a Christian mission, said once, I do not believe in our sending missionaries to these cultures to try to change them. They have their religions - we should not try to proselyte them from Budiasm, from Islam. We should not go with superior attitude that we have a better religion. They have a religion adapted to their own culture.

Now that reminds us of people who say it makes no difference what you believe. Just so you believe something, believe sincerely, and practice it daily. Surely you could not believe that. It does make a difference what you believe.

For example, those people who remember World War II, that was the war that was carried out because somebody believed something. In fact, that man believed that his whole nation was a superior race. He believed it so much that he was going to destroy all the Jews. And 6 million Jews were killed. He believed it so much that he was going to take the world for his cause. Now, he believed something and it made a difference what he believed. Could you say, that it makes no difference if you want to believe that way, as long as you believe it and sincerely practice it. Of course, it makes a difference what you believe. There is a belief that damns. It is hellish - it is a lie. And there is a belief

that is true. Paul says, this is what you have done. You have turned the truth of God into a lie.

III. YOU HAVE REJECTED THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. V, 28

This is the other indictment that Paul has against them. Since the earliest of times in V. 26 & 27, you have known that God made the earth, the sky, and all of the things in this world. They knew all of this about him and would not admit it. They would not worship him. They would not give thanks to him. The very nature of this creation, we know there is a god. We know in our hearts there is a creator and a maker. We will not acknowledge it.

Paul also says, that we have a revelation of conscience, for down in our hearts we know right from wrong. God's law is written in our hearts. And there is a consciousness that accuses us. And we want to excuse this - as these people were.

Well, what terrible people who did all these things. Surely the judgement of God will come upon them but not upon us, we say. Paul says, no, no. Do you think God will condemn others for doing things and over look your doing them. Now Paul, in writing to the Jews, said we are his chosen people. We are in favor with God. God will excuse us. You know that sounds very much like Americans talking. Today we think that God has chosen us in a special way and we say that God is not going to judge us in this way. Do we not have on our coins, "in God we trust". Do we not say, this nation under God. Our country was founded upon religious principles. Surely, God is not going to judge us in the same way that he judges the communists.

Why surely God is going to judge ~~the communists~~. Think about the millions of people slaughtered in purges in China. Think about 30 million people killed in Russia during Stalin's purges. We say God is going to punish those people, but not us. We are the chosen people.

Paul answers we are all under this indictment. And we are all guilty. Paul is describing a situation of degeneracy of morals almost without parallel in human history.

We see that it was an age of shame

First, an age when things seem, as it were - out of control. Right and wrong are confounded. It was an age of terror. For as one tells us that in Rome, no day passed but what someone was executed. It was sheer utter terror. There was the perishing of the victim in her own prosperity. Being an age of moral suicide.

And of course, this age of shame was unparallel luxury. In the public baths of Rome - the hot and cold water ran from silver taps. And the emperor sprinkling the floor of the circus arena with gold dust, instead of saw dust. It was an age when riches sapped - and money became the ruin of truth and honor. And a time when they said, we asked not what a thing is but what it costs. It was an age so weary of ordinary things, that it was avid for new sensations. Hence, bitterness flows from every fountain of pleasure. Crime became the only antidote to boredom - to gain wilder delight.

And this age of shame in the third place was unparallel immorality. There had not been one single case of divorce in 520 years of the history of the Roman republic. The first Roman recorded as having divorced his wife was in 234 BC. Seneca said, women were married to be divorced. And divorced to be married.

The Roman high born matrons dated the years by the names of their husbands and not by the council. As Clement of Alexander speaks, he cites the case of a woman who had 8 husbands in 5 years. He cites the incredible case of the emperor - the wife of Claudius. Who at night used to leave the royal palace and go down to serve in the houses of prostitutes for the sake of sheer lust.

Now there is nothing that Paul said in this Scripture about the heathen world that the historians have not said about themselves already. And the vice did not stop with the crude and natural vices. Society from top to bottom was riddled with unnatural vice. 14 out of the first 15 emperors were homosexuals.

So far from exaggerating the picture, Paul drew it with restraint. And it was there that Paul was eager to preach the Gospel. It was there that he was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. The world needed the power that would work salvation. And Paul knew that no where else than in Christ, did that power exist.

IV. WHAT IS THE VERDICT.

We have looked at the indictments. The verdict is guilty. God will be made manifest. What do we mean by the wrath of God.

First, let us understand by the wrath.

We know something about human wrath. It is an emotion. It is when a teen-age boy without a driver's license slips the keys to the family car and goes for a pleasure drive. He has an accident. Now what does he tell his friends at school. Boy, did I suffer the wrath of my father. Was he mad. Did he beat me. Now some think the wrath of God is something like a father who slaps or spansks a

child. That God hurls down an earthquake or a volcano and destroys a city. He gets mad at folks down here on the earth. And he hurls his wrath at them.

The wrath of God is the built-in resistance of God to sin. To unrighteousness. It is God's loving nature. His holy nature. His pure nature is constructed in the work of this universe. And all of this is the law of God. All of the structure of the universe goes along against the unrighteousness of sin.

Now the love of God is not just an emotion - like his wrath is not an emotion. But it is the very nature of God to love and to bless. We discover that God sends the rain on the good and on the bad alike. The sun is allowed to shine on the good and the bad alike. It is structured into this universe that there are other laws which operate in the nature of God. The law of gravity, for example, is a physical law.

Now if I go up tonight to the top of this church - on top of the steeple and I should jump off trying to defy the law of God, I don't defy it. I am caught up in the wrath of the law of God. Now it is not that God is mad at me for jumping, and breaking my leg or neck whichever might take place - but I am putting myself into the framework of God's law. When I violate his law, I suffer consequences.

Now the same thing is true in moral law - when I sin, sin violates that law. And I get myself in the process. The judgement of God begins to work. Not because God is mad at me but just because I am going to break God's law and my life does this. God's law broke me, you see. Even this, that God in love made the law of gravity. Because he loved me.

Now what kind of God would it be, that if God in love decided that because of his wrath was going to let the law of gravity operate some other way. For example, you could pour a bucket of scalding hot water into a sink today. It would

go down because of gravity. You pour another bucket, scalding water, into the sink and instead of the law of gravity operating and pulling the water down - it shoots up straight into your face and scalds you. Now what kind of a world would this be. In fact, the law operates consistently.

Now this is the way that judgement, the wrath of God comes upon people, when they sin. It is an extension of the love of God. He has given us an orderly way to live. When we violate that orderly way, we are caught up in the wrath. And in the disobedience of that law.

Now the writer of Hebrews said it was an awful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. It is an awful thing to be caught up in this process of the law of sin and retribution. Not that God is angry with us but that this law is structured into our universe. It is an awful thing, for a man to fall off of a tower of a building. It is going to break you up. It is an awful thing that under the power of gravity, it may destroy a person. That is why you ought not to sin - don't get caught up in it. That is what he is saying, not that God is angry with you - but this is structured so that there is the wrath of God.

In the Old Testament we meet the wrath of God. The early part of the Old Testament connected this idea with the covenant people. They were to serve him. It meant that within the nation any breach of the law provoked the wrath of God. They had a covenant with God. And it tells us when they rebelled like the children of Korah - it ended in death for them.

When the Israelites worshipped the idols - it provoked the wrath of God.

Now the prophets had the same idea when they preached the day of terrible retribution and judgement. The world would be shattered - the sinner destroyed.

And the universe re-made before God's kingdom came. It was then that the wrath of God would go into terrible action.

Now the prophets did not regard that the wrath of God was going to be postponed until the day of judgement. But they saw that the wrath of God was continuously in action. His people strayed and were unfaithful. The wrath of God operated against them. And I will tell you today when people stray in sin, God's wrath is going to operate against them. God cannot tolerate sin. God is God. God's reaction against sin. God who brings on the wrath as spoken of here in the book of Romans. Paul goes on to insist that men cannot plead ignorance of God. They could not have seen what God is like - from God's world. And God's handiwork.

V. WHAT THEN IS THE JUDGEMENT - V. 24-25

I read here the terrible judgement in Romans. People did all of these things - the wrath of God fell upon them. The judgement of God was, God let them go.

v. 24 - wretchedness

He let them go ahead into every sort of sin. The law began to catch up with them and there was the "terrible picture of moral corruption". A godless society without character, without charity, without conscience. Sinking deeper and deeper. With all kinds of sex sins and homosexuality. All kinds of abuse. Dishonesty, and corruption. Now note, it was not this kind of sin that brought the wrath of God - but it was the consequences of their ungodliness and unrighteousness.

These were men with whom God could do nothing.

DO NOTHING.

God abandoning anyone - and yet there are two reasons for that.

✓ First, God gave man a free will. And God respects that free will.
In the last analysis, not even God is going to interfere, with your free will. Eph. 4:19 - Paul speaks of men having turned themselves over to lasciviousness - they have surrendered their whole will to it. In Hosea 4:17, he says Ephraim is joined to an idol. Let him alone. Before man, there stands an open choice. It has to be so - without a choice there can be no goodness. And without choice - there can be no love. If goodness and love have to be coherst, there really is no love, and there is no goodness. If a man deliberately choses to turn his back on God, then after God has sent his son, Jesus Christ into the world - not even God can do anything about it. When Paul speaks of God abandoning men to uncleanness. That word abandon, has no angry irritation in it. Indeed, it is not that type. The main force of it is - it is a sorrowful regret, as a lover, who has done all that he can do and do more. It describes exactly the feeling of a father when he saw his son turn his back on his home and go out to the far country. There is far more sorrow than anger in a man's heart when he sees a thing like that.

And yet this word, in the second place, abandon - there is more than just letting one go. It is judgement. Now this is one of the grim facts of life - sin begets sin. The more a man sins, the easier it is to sin. He may begin with sinning of a kind of an awareness of what he is doing. And end by sinning without a second thought. It is not that God is punishing a man - it is that he is bringing punishment upon himself. He is making himself a slave to sin.

Therefore, man has a will of choice - to freedom. And once he gets into sin, the most terrible thing about sin is that it has power to beget sin.

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And he becomes a slave as he abandons the right way. And sin is always a lie. Because the sinner thinks that his sin will make him happy. And in the end, it ruins life. Both for himself - for others in this world, and in the world to come.

You read the statistics - there is a parallel for us. The passage in Romans which we are talking about is just like the daily newspaper. Crime and lawlessness. It is the erosion of immoral society - drugs and alcohol. The government reports year after year that alcoholism is a damning force, upon the American society. 9 million alcoholics. 15 billion dollars the cost. 1/3 of all the homicides or murders are due to alcohol. Drunkardness. 1/2 of all the traffic deaths due to drunken drivers.

Drinking cuts 12 years from the life of the person who drinks it. We have become worried about drugs. Touching a fragment of our society. And ever increasing.

We call it a sickness - but then we say, let's sell more of it. Let the laws be more liberal so we'll have more sale of alcohol. And then we can make more alcoholics.

Now there is a secular society. The Sunday closing law. Now that really is not a matter of protecting churches, as so many people think about it. It is not just a matter of saying, shall we have seven days a week given over to money making. To physical, secular things. But it is saying this - shall we give one day to the spiritual side of man. Shall our society become more godless and secular, with the passing of each day.

In V. 26 - *vile affections* Paul says that is why God let go of them and then let them do all of these vile and evil things. So that even their women turned against

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God's natural plan for them. And indulged in sex sins with each other. Paul talks of sexual freedom. And that's what all the people today want to hear about. This is such an accurate description for today.

I read about an English preacher who said that homosexuality was not a sin. It was just a private affair between two consenting persons. And that they did what they did was their own business. It was not a moral issue, nor illegal. And there should be no scorn from society.

Now Paul said, this is the end. A circular sexual violent criminal society going deeper and deeper. And Paul said God is going to let it keep on going. And it is really not going to stop at the bottom - it is going on further.

Reprobate mind
V. 28 - 32 Paul talks about the life that has left God out of the reckoning. Now there is hardly a passage that so clearly shows what happens to a man when he leaves God out. It is not so much that God sends a judgement on a man, as a man brings a judgement on himself when he does not place God in the scheme of things. Such men do the things that are not fitting for any man to do. The man who banishes God loses his godliness - loses his manhood too. And there comes a long list of terrible things. As you look at them, if we had time to take them one at a time. But we do not. He mentions what happens to them. There is a kind of badness in a man who wishes to drag others down to his own level. It is destructive badness.

It is when the balance is turned toward that which is worse.

V. 31 - He says they were covenant breakers - breakers of agreements. In the great days of Rome, Roman honesty was a wonderful thing. A man's word was

as good as his bond. That was in fact, one of the great differences between the Roman and the Greek. The Greek was born a pilferer. The Greeks used to say if the governor or an official was entrusted with 240 pounds worth, and if there were 10 clerks to check up on him - he was certain to succeed in embezzling some of it. While the Roman, whether a general on a campaign or whatever, could deal with thousands of dollars just on his bear word alone. By using his word. Now Paul was remembering and recalling that there was a day of great honor. But the great days are now past.

He says they are without natural affections. Without any love for the family. That the family love was dying. Never was the life of a child so in jeopardy as at this time when Paul was writing. Children were considered a misfortune. When a child was born - the child was taken and layed at the father's feet. If the father lifted up the child, that meant that he acknowledged it. If he turned away and left it, the child was literally thrown out. There was never a night when there was not 30-40 abandon children left in Roman form. Every night in life, children were literally thrown away.

The historian Seneca, the great soul that he was wrote -

We kill a mad dog

We slaughter a fierce ox

We plunge the knife into sickly cattle

Lest they taint the herd

But children that are born weakly and deformed

We drown.

The natural bonds of human affection had been destroyed.

Unmerciful - there was never a time when human life was so cheap.

The slave could be killed or tortured by his master. For the slave was only a thing - and the law gave the master unlimited power. The story is told of a wealthy household - a slave was carrying a tray of glasses of crystal. He stumbled and a glass fell and broke. There and then his master had him flung alive into a fish pond in the middle of the court yard and the savage fish tore him limb from limb and devoured his living flesh. It was an age pityless in its very pleasure. Where people found their delight in seeing men kill each other. It was an age when mercy was gone.

Paul had one last thing to say about these people - they abandon God from their life. It usually happens that if a man is a sinner - he knows it. And if he allows something in himself - he knows what it is to be condemned. But in those days, they had reached the level - they send themselves and the encouragement of others encouraged them to go on.

1/32 - God Exposed the Human Heart

}	<i>Sharp Focus - EAVE them up:</i>
	<i>1. For Wrong LOVING 244</i>
	<i>2. " " LIVING 26+</i>
	<i>3. " " THINKING 28-32</i>

George Bernard Shaw once said - no nation has ever survived the loss of its Gods. And here Paul has given a terrible picture of what happened. When men have deliberately banished God. And Rome was to perish.

Now in closing, I say that though the judgement and the wrath of God is following the indictment which he has offered - it is certain to come. There is deliverance.

The judgement of God is upon us. We are caught in this cycle of the wrath and judgement of God. Is there any way out.

Paul continues after painting this terrible picture, of society - that God has shown us a different way to Heaven. Not by being good enough, but God says he will accept us and equip us. Declaring us not guilty. If we trust Jesus

Christ to take away our sins, we all can be saved in this way. By coming to Christ - no matter who we are or what we have been like. We all have sinned. All have fallen short of the glorious ideal.

Yet God declares us not guilty if we trust Jesus Christ who in his blood takes away our sins.

God sent Jesus to take the punishment of our sins. And the end of all of God's anger and wrath against us. He uses Christ's blood and he uses our faith as a means of saving us from his wrath.

That is it. In our unrighteousness, God sent Jesus Christ. That his righteousness might be given to us, and he could declare us acquitted, at the judgement day.

Now that is offered to you today if you will receive Christ as your Lord and as your Saviour.

*One Remedy from The Curse & Cure of Sin -
I read of a farmer who was found kneeling at a soldier's grave near
Nashville, Tenn. Some one came by & said 'was your son buried here?'
No, during the War of the States my family was sick - I was drafted -
one of my neighbors came over & said 'I'll go for you, I have no family.
He went, & was wounded, at Chickamauga - carried to a hospital
& died.
I have come here over many miles, that I might write these words
over his grave 'He died for me' -
Christ died for you -*