

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

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May 11th, 2025

Sermon Title: God's Wrath

Sermon Text: Romans 1:18-32

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

Rom. 1:19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

Rom. 1:20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Rom. 1:21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Rom. 1:22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools,

Rom. 1:23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Rom. 1:24 ¶ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,

Rom. 1:25 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.

Rom. 1:26 ¶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature;

Rom. 1:27 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.

Rom. 1:28 ¶ 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.

Rom. 1:29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,

Rom. 1:30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,

Rom. 1:31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Rom. 1:32 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.

Main Point: The knowledge wrath of God is something that people should see as a beautiful and glorious truth about God.

Outline:

1. The Righteousness of God's Wrath
2. The Reality of God's Wrath
3. The Result of God's Wrath

Introduction

One of the least favorite Christian doctrines, if you ask most people, is probably the doctrine of the wrath of God. Modern people find it offensive, and so they question it, reinvent it, doubt it, and try to explain it away. Even those who are Christians sometimes find themselves trying to smooth out the negative perceptions of God's wrath. And yet what if I could tell you that there is great beauty in the wrath of God?

I think that would be counter-intuitive, but I hope by the time we're done you will actually feel that way. I want you to see and appreciate the beauty of God's wrath today, as hard as that may be to imagine.

This section of Romans 1, from verse 18 to 32 is Paul's own effort to show that even Gentiles who don't have the written law of Moses are still guilty before God, because they actually do have full knowledge of the God whom they've been in rebellion against.

In chapter 2, he'll turn his attention to the Jews to show that they are guilty because they have God's law and they know better. Many of Paul's readers of this letter will be Gentiles, but many will also be Jews, and Paul is committed to showing *everyone*, no matter who they are, that they are guilty and therefore need the gospel. This book (Romans) is far-reaching in its sweep, and isn't just for one particular group in one particular place. By design... the way it's written... every human being – whether they are a Jew or a Gentile – will find something to offend them in this book! That includes you and me.

And I suspect today's passage may be one of those passages for us. We may naturally think that the only kind of person who can really appreciate the idea of the wrath of God is some dark hearted twisted misanthropic individual who just secretly hates mankind deep down.

And what I want to say to you is that yes, there may be weirdos out there who really do just sort of relish the idea of God being angry at their neighbor. This can always happen with truths about God, where some people just have an imbalanced or unhealthy understanding of him. But don't worry about those folks – instead, let's seek to have the same appreciation for God's wrath that Paul seems to have, and that the prophets seem to have. Let's let God tell us what he's like and then find joy in knowing him better as he reveals himself.

1. The Righteousness of God's Wrath

This first point is the righteousness of God's wrath.

Verse 18 gives us at least two important things. Let me read it again:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”

First, Paul says there IS a such thing as the wrath of God. I will say more about this in the next point.

But the second thing that Paul says is that God’s wrath is “against unrighteousness.” So Paul says, this wrath of God has a focal point – the thing against which it is aimed. Paul says it is against unrighteousness, which is another way of saying that his wrath is righteous.

We need to talk about something more fundamental about the wrath of God, because for many people, the wrath of God is something they are either afraid of, embarrassed of, or at the very least just happy to sort of think about something else instead. The wrath of God, for some is like the doctrinal black sheep of the theological family. Some of us just sort of try to pretend that it’s not there.

But the problem here isn’t with God or his wrath, it really is with us. And so we need to be biblically informed. I want us to think Biblically by seeing and understanding that the wrath of God is something that is good and beautiful and true, because it belongs to the God who is good and beautiful and true. And I want you to see that it is just as important and beautiful an aspect of God’s nature and character as his love, his wisdom, and his mercy are.

In fact, the doctrine of divine simplicity tells us that God doesn’t have parts or composition – which means he is not composed of different characteristics, but that his is instead Who He Is, and the things that he is, he fully is. This means that He is his love. It means that he is his wisdom. It means that he is his power and so on. But it also means that his wrath is his love. His wrath isn’t merely a part of him, but along with love and wisdom and mercy, his wrath is *all* that he is.

We are not used to thinking of God’s wrath as God’s love, but think about this with me a moment. We know that God is love. We know this because the Biblical authors insist on it. But if God is love then how can he also be wrath? The answer is that love and wrath are not in conflict. We think of them as being in conflict, but they’re not. They are not set against each other.

God is love before you or I even exist. He has always been love. And he did not require mankind in order to be love. God eternally knows and loves himself. If he were to prize anyone or anything above himself, he would be an idolater, because he is the greatest and most precious being in all of the universe. If he loves something more than himself, then he has wrongly ordered loves and is not good, and is even worse an idolater. By his very nature, God must love himself above all else. And we see this all over the Bible, that when God acts, it is always with respect to his own nature and the jealousy of his own glory.

Let me give you a couple of examples just to give you a flavor of this from the Bible. In Isaiah 48:9 God says that he defers his anger from Israel, and he says why: "For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another." So notice that the thing which motivates God to remove his anger from Israel is, in one sense, Israel-centered, right? Because if he pours out his anger on Israel it will reflect poorly on him, and his glory may be given to another if that happens. But it's even more deeply God-centered. Israel benefits from the God-centeredness of God because he's put his name on them and attached his own reputation to what actually happens to them! He does what he does because he worships himself first and foremost.

In Ezekiel 20:14 God explains why he spared Israel in the wilderness. And when he explains what drove him to do this he said this: "I acted for the sake of my name, that I should not be profaned in the sight of the nations." So you see, he was kind to Israel because he had a greater desire above all else to protect his own glory. If something had happened to Israel it might have sullied his name among the nations because he put his name on these people. And if they crumble, everyone will say that Yahweh their God was actually weak. And he couldn't let that happen because God is profoundly God-centered in all that he does. It's always all about him.

Or think of Psalm 106, which recounts God's rescue of Israel from Egypt. Listen to how the Psalm talks about that: "Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your wondrous works; they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love, but rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea. Yet he saved them for *his* name's sake, that he might make known his mighty power." So notice what drove God was not the goodness or righteousness of the fathers. In fact, if he had waited

for them to be good enough they would have stayed in Egypt. The Psalmist actually says, “Our fathers...did not consider your wonderous works...but rebelled.” So the thing that drives God to save them is what? “for his name’s sake, that he might make known his mighty power.” It was more important that people see his power in saving Israel. Why? Because he is concerned that His power needs to be seen the same way that a fountain needs to overflow!

God is love. Fundamentally he loves himself. And this is good news for us, not bad news. It’s the reason why he gave us the good news of Jesus in the first place. Jesus prays, “But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name” (John 12:27). Jesus appeals to the God-centeredness of God in order to make the gospel happen.

Or Romans 15:8-9 where Paul says that “Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.” What is Paul saying? He’s saying that Jesus came to show the truthfulness of God, and to show the mercy of God.

Christ came because the reputation of God was at stake. And that is good news for us! So you see how God’s own God-centeredness is a win-win. It’s a win for God because he gets the glory, and it’s a win for sinners because he gets glorified when he rescues us!

And that means that the gospel exists because God loves himself. This is what it means that God is love. He is the one being for whom selfishness is not a vice, but a virtue. There is no one higher than him in all the universe. No one else who deserves his attention and glory. There is no one greater to love. There is no one more important or great or glorious. He loves his own mercy, so he shows it off in Jesus. He loves his own truthfulness so he keeps his promises in Christ, so that we will see his truthfulness and glorify him for being truthful and faithful and loving and merciful. He’s a promise-keeper who swears even to his own hurt.

So what I’m trying to get you to see is that it is very good news that God is love. And even more, it is very good news for all of us that God loves himself above all else. And when we rest in Christ and receive the good news of the gospel, we are at once giving God the glory, putting him at the center, and also being greatly

blessed by him! God gets the glory, and we get the blessing. And by being blessed by him, we are fulfilling the purpose for which we were made in our first place (which is to glorify him).

Okay, but how is God's wrath righteous? Well here's where what I've been saying brings these different ideas together: God loves himself, as we saw. He is jealous for his own glory, as we saw. When his creatures, who were made for his glory besmirch his glory by sinning in his face and spitting in his face, what they are doing is they are speaking a falsehood about God. They are believing a lie about God.

Let's use a simple example: Adam and Eve. In the garden, they take the fruit because they believe a prior lie that was suggested by Satan: "God is selfish and he's keeping something back from us." To take the fruit is to believe that lie. In other words, to disobey is the opposite of exalting and glorifying God. When they sin, they denigrate God, they drag him down, and try to put themselves in his place and even stand in judgment over him.

Whenever we sin, we are thinking so well of ourselves and so poorly of God that we are really accusing him of being evil and saying that we think we know better and we are better. This is what makes sin so horrifying and dark: it is the complete inversion of reality.

But God is good. And if he is good, and if he is great, and is insulted and thrown down and hated by creatures who by their desires and actions proclaim him to be bad, or untrustworthy, or dishonest, then what should a good God do? Stand by indifferent? Not care about his name? Ignore it? Wink at sin? If we take God seriously, then we must take this problem seriously.

No, the right response is for God to treat such people the way they deserve: as rebels and enemies. This is what we are talking about when we talk about the wrath of God: his right, appropriate, holy, and good expression of his justice, in defense of his name, ensuring that sin and evil does not go unpunished. The wrath of God is a good and right and just response to sin, because God is good and right and holy and just.

Here's what St. Anselm says. I think this is helpful: "For God to pass over sin without punishment would be to remove the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, which would be inconsistent with his justice."

Here is the reality: because God is infinitely precious, infinitely valuable, infinitely good, and infinitely holy, his wrath, unless it is answered or satisfied or appeased, calls for a response that is infinite in its depth and scope, because God's greatness is infinite in its scope. The punishment is meant to be commensurate with the value of the God who has been disobeyed, dishonored, and lied about.

So what I'm trying to get us to see is that not only is the wrath of God terrible toward sinners, but it is also good and beautiful to the core. It is sin that is ugly, not the wrath of God. It is rebellion that is so horrible and offensive, not God's justice.

In human sin, the good God has been insulted, and as Paul is telling us here, God's wrath is very real.

2. The Reality of God's Wrath

I don't want to dwell on this point too long; I do think it's been sufficiently explained. But I do want to briefly mention our second point, which is the reality of God's wrath. I've sort of endeavored to explain it to you but I want you to see that it is quite real.

Not everyone loves the reality of God's wrath. I remember hearing Keith Getty, who wrote the song *In Christ Alone*, and if you remember there is that line in the song where the song says, "And on the cross as Jesus died/The wrath of God was satisfied." And I remember hearing Keith Getty say during an event in Jackson, MS while I was in seminary, that he was asked once by a mainline U.S. denomination if they could use *In Christ Alone* in their denomination's hymnal. And at first he thought, "Well of course." But the denomination had a request: that they could change the line from "*The wrath of God was satisfied*" to "*the love of God was satisfied*." When he said that no that was not an option and asked why they said that some people are

troubled by the line. That they prefer to think of Jesus as satisfying God's love, not his wrath.

For many the wrath of God is either something to be ignored, or something to be denied. And yet if we are guided by God's word, we should believe in it. Even just this verse here this morning is evidence of that. Paul says, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven" (1:18). Rather than seeing this as an ugly truth Paul sees it as a necessary reality that human beings have to face.

If we will not face it, then he is telling the Romans (and us!) that we will never really understand the cross, and we will never understand why sin is such a fundamental problem. If you believe in a God without wrath, you truly can't make sense of this letter, of the good news, of why the gospel is glorious, or why Jesus Christ came into the world at all. And you certainly won't understand the cross. Without the wrath of God, the cross will just look like a sad, tragic event where a good man experienced a sad death, and nothing more.

The wrath of God is very real, and the point Paul is making is that it's universal anywhere that sin is.

Look at the rest of this passage beyond verse 18. What Paul is arguing is that all of us know better. No matter where we are, no matter what our background is, (as we saw last week) none of us have any excuses. We all know the truth, and because we know the truth, God's wrath against sin is right. It's good. It's fair.

3. The Result of God's Wrath

Okay, so if the wrath of God is righteous, if it's real, then what does that mean? Where is Paul leading us by bringing this up? The answer is, the result of God's wrath, which is our third point this morning.

Paul is leading us to this: Because God is wrathful toward sin, sin will be punished. It will of course be punished in eternity. The wrath of God means that even evils that aren't addressed in this life will still be answered one way or another. This is an incredible comfort if you have been devastated by the sin of someone who seemed to escape justice.

But the wrath of God, according to Paul, also has an impact right now. We live in a shattered and damaged world that is very much living in the aftermath of the hurricane that is human sin.

Sin is not just an idea. It damages everything and everyone it touches. It changes how we think, it changes what we love, it changes how we treat each other, and it reaches completely to the heart of each and every person.

When Paul describes the impact of the wrath of God, you might think it's just something in eternity when we think of hell, which is very real, and which Jesus taught about a great deal. But Paul here says actually you can see God's wrath in the lives of sinful people right now.

When you see someone who is knee-deep in sin and only seems interested in going deeper, that is itself an expression of God's wrath. That's why Paul says, "Therefore God gave them up to the lusts of their heart... to the dishonoring of their bodies." In other words, sin is a punishment for sin. God does not have to create the sin in the heart of any person – we already have plenty of that in ourselves already.

Let me give you an example. I thought this was profound:

In February, the terrorist organization Hamas turned over the bodies of two Israeli children whom they had kidnapped on October 7th 2023 and then murdered about a month later. One was little Kfir who was 9 months old, and the other was 4 year old Ariel. Their mother Shiri Bibas was also kidnapped and murdered by Hamas.

And in the moment when Hamas finally turned over the bodies to the Israelis after holding them for more than a year, Hamas held a celebration where they desecrated the bodies of these little ones. And I was listening to an Israeli person talking about this, and here is what she said.

She said that this sort of ghoulish celebration and rejoicing in the death of a little girl and a little baby is its own punishment from God. To be brought to such a low place as a human being that you would be *glad* to see a dead 9 month old baby is a horribly low and dark place for anyone's heart to be

taken to. But wasn't that interesting? The idea that this celebration itself was a punishment all its own.

In a sense, even this ghoulish celebration was evidence that the wrath of God is very real. We can see it objectively before our eyes.

When we go downtown and see people laying on the sidewalk, needles hanging from their arms, completely oblivious to the world around them, drawn into themselves, unable to move or care for themselves, we are seeing that God's wrath is real.

We don't have to wait for the day of judgment to know it. The fruits of sin are evident in the world. G.K. Chesterton once said in perhaps a bit of understatement that Original Sin is the one Christian doctrine that we can empirically verify just by looking around ourselves. The wrath of God is real. We saw it in that horrible celebration by Hamas, and we see it all around ourselves in other ways even now.

Sin is its own punishment for sin. When God gives us what the darkness of our own hearts really want, we are also experiencing God's wrath. Often getting our own way is the worst possible thing God could give us. Here's what Peter Martyr says: "This is the ultimate punishment, when man is forsaken by God and handed over to govern himself."

We will discuss this idea of God giving us over in more detail later as we move through Romans. But if I might move to a conclusion that Paul states in the first verse of the next chapter, Paul says, "Therefore you have no excuse, O man." That really is the conclusion he is moving us toward. He wants us to feel it in our bones that there is no excuse.

Yes, this book is about the good news. But it won't be good news if we won't face the truth first.

A cure for cancer will only come to you as good news if you've received a diagnosis. And Paul is working hard here at the end of Romans 1 to bring us the diagnosis that he needs us to see: and the diagnosis is sin. And left unaddressed the outcome will be God's wrath, richly deserved, justly deserved, absolutely right and fair.

And here is my question for you: you and I are sinners. We are sinners because we sin, and we sin because we are sinners. It is everywhere, and it is all over our lives. It's undeniable. Surely you know this about yourself as well.

My question is, what are you going to do with that diagnosis? Will you make excuses? What do you do with that sense of guilt already? Do you engage in a blame game? Do you try passing it to someone else? Do you try minimizing your sin? Later Paul will ask if you try to erase your sin by just piling up good deeds and ceremonies, as if that has the power to turn away God's wrath. Do you do those things?

I can tell you what Paul wants for his readers – that's you and me. He wants us to flee to Jesus.

God is speaking through his word to you today. He wants you to realize you have nothing. You have no excuse. You have no escape from the conclusion that your sin demands that God's wrath receive an answer. And you have no power to cleanse yourself from it.

Conclusion

So God's wrath is real. You might be thinking, "Well this is a bummer. I thought Romans was a book about good news. I thought this was about the gospel!" Well you can't have the gospel without this.

I mentioned before that God's love is his wrath, and his wrath is his love. And I mentioned that even when evil people are judged and punished, it is an expression of God's love.

But there is another very very precious and important way in which we see that this is true, and that is in the death of Jesus Christ. Because in the death of Jesus, the wrath of God is satisfied once and for all.

St. Anselm (writing around the year 1100 AD) brings these pieces all together: "In the death of Christ, God's justice and mercy meet, for through the satisfaction of justice, mercy is freely given. Thus, God is just in requiring satisfaction and He is merciful in providing it."

Here is where these things all come together: At the cross of Jesus, not only do we see just how seriously God takes sin, not only do we see the wrath of God at the cross... but perhaps just as precious as God's holiness, we see the lengths he will go to so that you and I can have peace with God, by having his wrath removed and the penalty of our sin satisfied in His son.

We face the hard thing and acknowledge our sin. But having seen the truth and faced it, we come to Jesus Christ, who becomes even more beautiful in the eye of a sinner like you and me. And I said this at the start: I want you to see the beauty in the wrath of God.

And here we finally can. Why? Because in Jesus we see that the same God whose wrath has been kindled by our sin is also the same God who will remove it. There is no better news.

Let's pray.