

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 1:18-22

Student Notes:

Verse 18: “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”

Two diametrically opposed forces are both being revealed at the same time in our world: Righteousness and Wrath.

Paul’s intention: Demonstrating why the gospel is so badly needed among humans – and what the results of ignoring it will be. *** Righteousness by faith is critical if we are to be able to deal with an entirely holy God.

- **God’s Revelation of Himself:**

Paul: How revealed himself to our world: [Note: reverse order] 1. God reveals his glory and eternal power through his creation. 2. God reveals his wrath against the sin of those who suppress their knowledge of the Creator. 3. God he reveals his righteousness through the gospel. 4. God reveals his power in believers by saving them.

- **Genesis and Romans 1: The Genesis Narrative and Paul’s Outline:**

Genesis 1-3: The creation of the world and the classification of its creatures into birds and animals and reptiles.

Romans 1:22 &23: Man’s exchange of the glory of God for animal images.

Genesis 3:1-7: The fall of man/woman due to the deception of Satan in convincing our first parents to rebel against the knowledge of God and a resolve to become wise.

Romans 1:19-23: Humans reject the knowledge of God and become “fools”.

Genesis 3: Adam and Eve refused to remain God’s dependent creatures and exchanged God’s truth for Satan’s lie.

Romans 1:21: “Their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

- **Two Realities: The Theologian’s Hurdle:**

Paul’s statements in our text: 1.The universal state of mankind’s wickedness. 2.The wrath of God revealed from heaven against all human wickedness.

The theologians' hurdle: "How can wrath be attributed to the all-holy God?"

- **Three questions the "wrath of God" requires answers for:**

1. What is the wrath of God?

Two extremes: 1. The very notion of wrath or anger as a personal attribute or attitude of God must be dismissed. 2. God's wrath is identical to that of humans.

C. H. Dodd: (commentary on Romans 1932): Dodd insisted that the subject of God's wrath is used throughout the New Testament in an impersonal way. The use of "wrath" is apart from God's person.

The difficulty with that view: Paul treats the subject of grace in the same way. Romans 5: The phrase, "the grace of God" and the phrase "the grace which" are used interchangeably. Grace is not divorced from God's personal attributes.

A Definition of the Wrath of God: "God's wrath is his holy opposition or hostility towards evil. God cannot be neutral towards evil. His holiness requires him to judge evil."

The parallel to the name "Jehovah": Ultimately Jehovah means the God who must judge sin in humans, not matter what the cost to himself.

God's wrath is unlike human wrath: God does not fly into a rage. He does not lose his temper. His wrath is not based upon such character flaws as malice, spite, or vindictiveness.

The Commonality of Wrath in the two Testaments: See: Jeremiah 30:23; Nahum 1:2; Matthew 3:7; Revelation 19:15.

Wrath is consistent in both testaments. It is God's holiness acting against evil or unrighteousness in any form.

2. Against what is God's wrath revealed?

Generally speaking, the wrath of God is directed against evil alone. Paul: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness..."

- **Godlessness:** The attempt to eliminate God. Since that is impossible the remaining option is to live as if one had succeeded in doing so. The essence of atheism; to live as if one had eliminated the reality of God from one's life. (Psalm 14:1: "The fool hath said in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.")

The Difficulty with Wrath: While God's wrath is directed against godlessness and wickedness, the problem is, those things are centered in humans. While God's wrath is not pointed at humans per se, because their hearts are the depositories of the enemies of God's holiness, they become the objects of his wrath.

Paul: Humans have made a decision to eliminate God from their lives and live for themselves. They deliberately stifle any truth that challenges their self-deification.

3. How is God's wrath revealed?

A. Acts of Judgment:

- Old Testament examples: 1. Total depravity and Noah's flood. 2. Aaron's sons' rebellion and their consummation by the fire from the altar. 3. Israel's desert grumbling and the fiery serpents. 4. King David's illegal census and the plague.
- New Testament Examples: 1. Ananias and Saphira's judgment (Acts 5). 2. Herod's death by an angel for blasphemy (Acts 12). 3. Elymas the sorcerer's intervention in Paul's ministry (Acts 13).

B. Future Judgment:

God's wrath will be revealed in the future, at the end, in the judgment of the last day: "The coming wrath", "The day of God's wrath", etc.

C. God's wrath through the public administration of justice. See: I Peter 2:13-14; Romans 13:1-3

D. God's Release of Humanity To Do Evil: (Consequences of Atheism)

Paul's use of the phrase, "God gave them over". See: Romans 1:24, 26, & 28.

Paul's emphasis: Since humans insist on acting as if God has been eliminated He allows them to experience life as if that were indeed the case. Paul punctuates this reality throughout this chapter when he writes:

The impact: Being turned over to ourselves means that we are on our own. His gracious assistance is removed. We are allowed to experience the full consequences for our godlessness. As a result, within limitations, God lets the godless live as godless. (See: Ephesians 2:12 ff.)

Let me summarize what I have shared in these sessions on this passage so far:

1. What Is God's Wrath?

God's wrath is his holy opposition or hostility towards evil. God cannot be neutral towards evil. His holiness requires him to judge evil.

2. Against what is God's wrath revealed?

Generally speaking, the wrath of God is directed against evil alone. This is not the same as when you or I have our pride wounded and attack someone. As one scholar put it, "Nothing arouses it [the wrath of God] except evil, and evil always does."

While God's wrath is directed against godlessness and wickedness, the problem is, those things are centered in humans.

3. How is God's wrath revealed?

- It is revealed in Acts of Judgment in the New Testament.
- It is revealed through the public administration of justice.
- It is revealed in God's "turning us over" to the consequences of our own godlessness (while God still restrains complete chaos)

Next time, we look closer at this passage from verses 18-22.