

God's Wrath Revealed

Romans 1:18-23

A couple of times a year I have the privilege of teaching shop class at South Shore Christian School here in Leamington.

Anybody take shop class in school when you were young?

Every time I teach that class I always take some time on the first day to emphasize the importance of safety.

In the class the kids use power tools like a table saw, planer, mitre saw, band saw, and drill press.

On that first day I explain a little bit about what each tool does, how it operates, and go over how to use each one safely.

Without being overly graphic I explain to the kids some of things that could happen if they ignore the safety rules.

I do that because I need them to have an appreciation for what they are being kept safe from.

I always explain to them that safety is my number one concern in that class and so it is something that we talk about all the time.

Every time a student comes to a power tool I ask them, "What are the things we have to keep in mind to use this tool safely?"

Most students forget and so we do a quick review.

Some students get annoyed by the review, they just want to turn on the saw and cut some wood.

In their mind they can't see the big deal and that is because they don't seem to appreciate the power it takes to move a metal blade through a piece of wood and ***if people fail to take seriously what we are being kept safe from, we will have little appreciation for what is keeping us safe.***

[That same thing is true when it comes to the things of God. ***If are going to have an appreciation for our salvation we need to know what we are being saved from.***

This morning we are spending our time in God's Word in the book of **Romans 1:18-23**. These verses directly follow the apostle Paul saying this...**1:16**. That gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." That is good news, it is the greatest news that anyone could possibly receive. Here is the thing, the only way we can truly appreciate that is if we have some kind of understanding of what Jesus is saving people from. That is what our text is about this morning, it is about the wrath of God. This morning we are looking at Paul's explanation for why God's wrath comes and next week we will see how God's wrath comes upon humanity. As we begin looking at why God's wrath comes we learn from verse 18 that...]

Point #1 – God’s wrath comes upon evil. (Verse 18)

Because of Who He is the LORD must take action when people think, feel, say, or do what is wrong.

Look with me at the beginning of **verse 18**. (Stop at heaven)

The word ‘for’ here connects what is about to be said to what has just been said.

He has just told us about the gospel being ‘the power of God for salvation’ in verse 16 and how in this gospel ‘the righteousness of God is revealed’ according to faith.

The reason why that is so important, the reason every man, woman, and child should look to the cross of Christ is because ‘*the wrath of God is revealed from heaven...*’

The wrath of God is His carrying out of punishment upon people.

What I find particularly sobering about listening to those words is that they are in the present tense.

In other words this is something that is happening now.

I don’t know about you, but when I think of God’s wrath or His handing out punishments I usually think about the future.

I think about when people die and are cast into hell or I think about when Jesus comes with a sword to strike down all of His enemies.

Those things are certainly true and they are in the future, but there is also an aspect of God’s judgment that is happening right now.

Paul will get to what that looks like in verse 24, but before he does he first tells us why it is happening. (**Verse 18** stop at ‘men’)

The fact that God’s wrath is ‘revealed from heaven’ is significant.

In this context ‘heaven’ refers to the place where God makes His glory most visibly present.

The place where He appears seated upon His throne and angels surround that throne in worship.

Saying that His wrath is ‘revealed from heaven’ means that God is actively giving commands to bring His judgment upon the earth.

That is happening it says ‘against **all** ungodliness and unrighteousness of men’.

Ungodliness is a rejection of the LORD and unrighteousness is a rejection or a breaking of His moral laws.

You see the Bible tells us that God in His nature is a moral being.

What is so important for us to understand here is that it is impossible to separate what the LORD does from Who He is.

In making the decision to create the universe and in particular humanity, God bound Himself to give moral laws that must be obeyed because it would be impossible for Him to create a universe contrary to His nature.

Because He is morally perfect and He is the ultimate law giver He must take action against those who violate His laws.

A passive god cannot be a Holy God, a permissive god cannot be a good God.

[We all know this is true. Quick show of hands, how many of you have something in your life that is important to you? Imagine for a moment that whatever is most important to you is stolen from you. Now imagine the police catch the person who did the stealing and bring you and the thief before a judge and the judge says, “It doesn’t matter that this guy stole your stuff. I am setting him free and I’m letting him keep what he has stolen.” Is that a good judge or a bad judge? We all know that would be a bad judge.]

Listen, the LORD of all, the maker of heaven and earth is far beyond good, He is completely perfect.

He cannot look with indifference upon those who reject His goodness and His power.

He cannot look with indifference upon any evil action whether great or small.

He must respond with justice and wrath because it is impossible for Him to be less than He is.

[At this point some may want to object and say, “This sounds pretty unfair. What if people simply didn’t realize they were breaking God’s laws? What if people simply didn’t know that God exists and what He is like? God pouring out His wrath on ignorant people sounds very harsh. When people hear about the wrath of God they are often quick to think along these sorts of lines and try and shift the blame off of us and paint the LORD in a negative light instead. In the next few verses God’s word shows us the truth of the matter, it shows us that...]

Point #2 – God’s wrath comes because people reject truth. (Verses 18-20)

The condition of this present world is on account of people making purposeful decisions against LORD.

Having declared that God’s wrath is being revealed ‘against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men’ the apostle writes this at the **end of verse 18...**

Humanity’s greatest problem is bigger than a lack of knowledge, it is a willful and systematic rejection of what is true.

He explains this further in **verses 19.**

Every human being who has ever lived. Even those living completely cut off from the rest of the world have had truth set before them.

Those who have never held or read a bible have had God made known to them.

It says here this knowledge is 'plain', in other words it is obvious and it is understandable.

It is that way because 'God has shown it to them'.

The word translated 'shown' here means to make known or reveal something.

In other words God has set the truth of Who He is right in the front of the face of all people.

We are told how that has happened in **verse 20**.

There are two aspects to what is written here that I want to highlight.

First, from the very moment of creation all of creation has reflected Who God is, that is His glory.

Listen to what it says in Psalm 19:1-3, "*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.² Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.³ There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.*"

Whether we are looking into a microscope, a telescope, or just looking around generally, whatever we touch, taste, smell, or hear in creation is announcing to us that there is an eternal, triune, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, immutable, and holy God Who has made us and Who has the right to rule over us.

That is one thing. Secondly, I would suggest to you that creation is only possible because of Who God is.

[There are many examples to choose from to illustrate that point. Think for example of the size of the universe. No matter how far we can look we cannot see its end. If we could see its end then what would be outside of it? It seems to be infinite because an infinite Being created it to reflect His glory. Or we could ask the question, "What came before?" There are only two possibilities, either everything has been creating itself into all eternity past or a Creator Who has always existed in all eternity past brought everything into being. I am fully convinced that nothing cannot create something which only leaves the option of an eternal self-existing Creator.]

The necessity of God as revealed in the Bible is plain, which raises the question, "Why don't people accept that reality?"

The answer is the suppression of truth.

I like what Ian Paisley says about this, he says,

“The ignorance of man is his own workmanship. The light is shining but he deliberately puts it out or rather, unable to put it out, he puts out his own eyes so that he cannot see it.

Of course this also raises the question, “Can a person come to repentance and faith only through looking at creation?”

There is no sense of that possibility in this verse, not because of the lack of truth available in creation but because of the human heart’s default condition of suppressing the truth.

Some have suggested the possibility as a reason to stop sending missionaries to people who have never heard about Jesus.

They raise the possibility of a person or group of people having enough right understanding through the creation to be saved and then hearing about Jesus and rejecting Him and then ending up condemned.

Thinking like that completely misses the point of what the LORD is telling us here. If the human heart did not suppress the truth and believed rightly based on what is seen in Creation then how could such a person possibly reject Jesus Who Created it?

It is an impossible scenario. The light of the gospel can never plunge a person into darkness, it is the only power available to call someone out of darkness.

[This suppression of the truth is a great evil in the world. It is rejection of the goodness and greatness of Almighty God. It is despising the very reason for which we have been made and so God rightly opposes it and justly brings His judgement against it. This suppression of truth does not stop at simply rejecting the knowledge of God. We see that clearly in the last few verses of today’s passage. We see that...]

Point #3 – God’s wrath comes because people worship created things. (Verses 21-23)

Human beings are hard wired to be devoted to something. If we refuse to bow down to the LORD we will give our hearts and minds to something else instead. There is no such thing as neutrality in religion.

Look with me at verses 21-22.

One thing that stands out in these verses is the use of the past tense.

This failing to honour the LORD and failing to give thanks to him is something that started very near the beginning of creation.

You may recall that during Noah's lifetime, which is only about 1500 years after Adam and Eve left the garden, God describes the desires of the human heart as "only evil continually."

After the flood it is only a short time before people start right back down the road of suppressing truth and rejecting the LORD.

Every new generation inherits that heart condition and the process continues.

That raises a question, "How can God hold people accountable for decisions that their parents have made?"

I want to say a couple of very important things on that.

First, I would take this as an opportunity to call parents to feel the weight of the responsibility that has been placed upon you.

If you reject the truth there is a very high likelihood that your children will too.

Whether you know it or not you are leading your kids somewhere. Is it heaven or hell?

Secondly, I would take this opportunity to say whatever example we may have received from our parents the ultimate responsibility for what we do with the truth that the LORD has set before us is ours.

Growing up in a place with false religion and no bibles surely has a huge impact on people's lives, but even so each person has also contributed to the suppression of truth in the world.

This is where the suppression of truth ends up
(Verse 22-23).

The human heart will always be worshipping something.

Either it will worship the LORD or exchange His infinite worth and foolishly replace Him with created things.

The worship of man and nature is very strong in our culture.

There was a time not long ago in our society when the government saw itself as under God, but now we live in a time where the government believes it has authority over the church in the place of God.

The government believes it has the right to dictate morality and limit when and where the Word of God can be proclaimed.

We may not have the same number of statues that are worshipped as they did in the ancient world, but our society has without a doubt elevated the whims of man above the laws of God.

The Bible tells us that human beings are to be stewards of creation and master it to the glory of God and the good of humanity.

In our day children are taught in school that the earth itself is their creator and they are just another animal.

We live in a time where many people value trees and animals more than children.

Creation is worshipped/valued instead of our Creator.

It is a terribly sad exchange.

[Imagine for a moment having a brick of gold. Google informed me that a brick of gold is currently worth about 1.7million dollars. Imagine trading that for monopoly money? What would you say to somebody who made a trade like that? What would you think of somebody who made a trade like that? I think most of us would think that was pretty foolish and we would be right to think so.]

You know what? Trading a brick of gold for monopoly money is way smarter than exchanging the glory of God for created things.

Isn't it amazing how easily we can recognize the value of gold, but how blind we can be to the infinite worth of the LORD?

Listen God can't accept that.

It is impossible for Him to deny His own infinite worth because it is impossible for Him to deny the truth.

If we can even scratch the surface at the greatness of the offense that we are talking about, then we would have no problem understanding why 'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...'

If we can see that, then we see our great need of the gospel.

We will see our need of the power of God exercised in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection to save us from God's eternal judgement and to His glorious gift of eternal life.