**God’s Wrath Against Unrighteousness**
(The Good News of God’s Wrath)

Romans 1:18-32

Key Verse 1:18 – *“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness…”*

Over the next few weeks, our Romans Bible Study can be described in one word: heavy. This passage in particular is usually the point when people start to get really uncomfortable and feel weighed down because of the themes that Paul covers. However, the main purpose of this passage is to build on Paul’s grand declaration from last week’s passage; how the gospel — this good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection — has that power to save us because in the gospel, God reveals His righteousness as a gift to be received by faith, so that those who have their righteousness from God (and not themselves) will not perish but have everlasting life (Romans 1:16-17).

But for us to truly appreciate where God is bringing us to, we have to know what God is saving us from, namely His righteous and divine wrath. In John Stott’s commentary on Romans, he makes the following point, “*Nothing keeps people away from Christ the Messiah more than their inability to see their need of Him or their unwillingness to admit it. Our Christian prayer, duty and teaching is to bring people to accept the true diagnosis of their condition in the sight of God.*” You will never understand the depth and wonder of salvation until you understand what you are saved from. I pray that through this message we come to see the wrath of God in the correct light in that it is good news that leads us to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 18, **“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness…”** In older translations, this sentence begins with the word “*for*” or “*because*”, meaning that verses 16 and 17 are a direct consequence of verse 18. Just as the “the righteousness of God” is revealed in the gospel, God’s wrath is being revealed against all the sin, the evil and the wickedness of humanity. The wrath of God is a theme we need to be accustomed to. It appears 10 times in the Book of Romans. Furthermore, while “love” is the most used word to characterize God throughout the Bible, there are more references to God’s wrath, His righteous fury and absolute hatred of sin than there is of love. And yes, this includes the New Testament as well for Jesus often taught about God’s final judgment (i.e. wrath) through the use of parables (Matthew 21:33-46, 25:31-46, Luke 16:19-31). Back when we studied the Plague of the Firstborn (Exodus 11:1-12:30), we saw how God’s judgment fell on both the Israelites and the Egyptians. God wanted to underscore that He is the Ruler of all creation, the ultimate Authority who commands all of history, all the ways of man and can take away life just as easily as He gives it. Failure to heed His commandments and obey His Word results in our own death and destruction. This passage is no different. Even though Paul was specifically talking about the godlessness and wickedness of the Gentiles, these verses apply to each and every person living in this world whether they believe in Jesus or not.

Paul continues in verses 19 and 20; “**since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.**” Simply put, God has revealed Himself to us all through creation, including us (Genesis 1 & 2). In making us in His own likeness, He gave us both consciousness and a conscience to know right from wrong. He has filled us with His qualities and characteristics to fulfill our mission of taking stewardship of His creation. Not only are His divine fingerprints all over us, they are all over nature as well in all the things that bring joy and delight in this world. Think about it. The most beautiful art is inspired by God. The greatest music ever made is inspired by God and the greatest literature ever written is inspired by God. Through all this and so much more, God makes Himself known to believer and unbeliever alike. Even Jesus declares, **“[Your Father in Heaven]… causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous”** (Matthew 5:45b). From these verses, we can see that no person can say they have never “known” God for everything in and around our lives is a testimony to His Glory, His Majesty and gives us some inkling or insight into who He really is… so we have no excuse!

However, the problems arise when we supress this truth through our sinful nature and desires. Look at verse 21-23, **“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.”** Rather than give honour to God for being our Creator or give thanks to God for being under His sovereignty and care, we in our sinfulness rejected Him by creating all manner of gods and idols to replace Him. We exchanged the glory of the Creator for created things that are infinitely lesser than He is. Why? It is because our sinful hearts neither love God nor do they want God. We don’t want to be under His authority. We want to be the sole authority of our lives and will look for whatever means to achieve this. Look at the Greco-Roman world Paul lived in. They had gods for every single aspect of the human experience. Their cities were flooded with idols. Even though they thought of themselves as the most powerful and enlightened people to ever walk the face of God’s green earth, they practiced every kind of evil under the sun. Does this sound familiar? You don’t need to look too far to realize that we are no better than they were. Just look at the society and the world we live in. We want to be our own boss. We want to live by our own rules. We don’t want to be responsible or accountable to anyone or anything. We suppress the light of God’s glory and power because we love the darkness of our own independence. We love our sins, our self-determination, and therefore we suppress the truth that God is God, that we are to depend on Him always and live for His glory.

What are the consequences of our rejection of God? Start off by paying close attention to verses 24 and 25, **“Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.”** When we reject God, we are basically saying to Him, “I love my sin more than I love You. I take pleasure in my sin more than I delight in You. I would rather be a slave to sin than be a free and beloved child of Yours.” When we use our free will to reject God, He does the worst thing He could ever do to His beloved children; He gives them what they want and hands them over to their evil desires. See how the pattern of sin is repeated three times throughout the passage as it devolves into a vicious cycle. Sadly, we see this pattern most often manifested as it relates to sexual sins. Human sexuality is an amazing gift from God. God created both manhood and womanhood as the means for us to experience the deepest intimacy we can possibly experience in this life and as a symbolic representation of Christ’s relationship with His people, the church (Ephesians 5:21-33).

So if our relationship with Christ is broken and in disarray when we give ourselves over to our sinful desires, then in stands to reason that the understanding of our sexuality and our sexual relationships will suffer the same fate. We live in an era where sex and gender are deemed as the greatest and most quintessential forms of human expression. Many people see them as core to their identity and define themselves by them. In their thinking, it is their right as an individual to decide who they are, be with whoever they want to be with and be accepted for who they are according to their terms. That is the height of self-determination. In doing so, they deny God, suppress the truth of God and live a life completely divorced from spiritual reality.

Now, for many this passage is a stumbling block for it brings up the issues of same-sex attraction and LGBTQ+ (26-27). However, we are called by God to always speak the truth in love and with Christ-like compassion (Ephesians 4:15). The Bible is very consistent in calling this a sin and any attempts to reinterpret Scripture to say the opposite does a disservice to the Gospel and Scripture as a whole. However, it is an even greater disservice to narrowly view this passage strictly in terms of what it says about same-sex attraction. Doing this means missing the far more pressing issue that Paul raises in this passage for you can easily swap out same-sex attraction with any of the 21 other sins Paul lists in verses 29-31, **“They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.”**

Paul’s goal of detailing God’s wrath and man’s sin in such lurid detail is to convict us of our sinfully wretched state in the sight of God and our total inability to save ourselves from the righteous wrath of God. The brokenness and devastation we see in the world around us is the result of the same sin that exists in each and every one of us and there is a heavy price to pay for that. This passage is not meant for you to be able to go around deflecting from you own sins while pointing out the sins of others. Instead, this passage paints such a horrifying picture of how we and our sins deserve every bit of God’s punishment that will come crashing down upon us just as Paul summarizes this entire section in Romans 3:10b, “**There is no one righteous, not even one**.”

So how is any of this “good news”? Why is it a good thing that God’s wrath is against us? If you paid close attention to the start of this message, the answer is not in this passage per se but is actually the conclusion of last week’s passage. Again, let us read verses 16 and 17; **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”** Whenever God declares judgment, He always offers the way of salvation together with it. As God cast out Adam and Eve from Eden, He promised them that one day one of their offspring will crush the serpent’s head as a reference to how Jesus Christ will ultimately triumph over Satan (Genesis 3:15). As we studied with the Plague of the Firstborn, God tells the people how they could be saved by painting the lambs’ blood on the doors of their homes (Exodus 11:3-8,12-13), foreshadowing the coming of Christ once more. Even complete foreigners and enemies of God were offered that same grace like when God sent Jonah to Nineveh (Jonah 3).

Jesus Himself does the same thing in John 3:16-18, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”** God’s wrath upon sinners and His mercy upon sinners go hand-in-hand for they are both sides of the same coin. This is God’s truth He lovingly reveals to us through His Son Jesus Christ. It is solely through Jesus dying on the cross for our sins that the way of salvation is opened to us. His righteousness and His very life is freely given to us. All we are asked to do is not reject His truth but to accept it, live by it and build our lives on it, both now and eternally.

In conclusion, here is one my favourite quotes from Pastor John Piper; “*Superficial diagnoses lead to false remedies and no cures*.” You can’t apply a Band-Aid solution to a terminal problem. To properly understand our human condition, we truly and desperately need to have an honest examination of our own hearts in the light of His wrath and His mercy. It is amazing that as sinful, rebellious and broken as I am, Jesus was still willing to face the fullness and gravity of God’s wrath upon me by dying on the cross for me because that is how much He loves me (Romans 5:6-8). Rather than supress this truth, we are called to embrace it with all our being for only His truth sets us free from the power of sin and death (John 8:32 & 14:6). Even though we are unrighteous, and in our unrighteousness suppress the truth, our only shelter against His wrath is the righteousness God freely gives to us through Jesus Christ. Let us take to heart how wonderful all this is as we share the Good News to all people.

**One Word**: Don’t supress the truth. Embrace His truth.