

# Romans 1:18-23

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[0:00] Romans chapter 1, we're going to begin in verse 18 and read through verse 23. Paul writes, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. 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. For although they knew God, they didn't honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Let's pray together.

Father God, I pray that you find us humble this morning, expectant to hear from you. And as we study your word together, I pray that you will be generous to us, show us the failings in our own life, embolden us with the gospel.

[1:16] And I pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. And you remember over the past two weeks, we talked about Paul's obligation to gospel ministry, first to the church and then to the world.

In verse 16, he says, For it, meaning the gospel, is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. It being the only thing, the only power of God for salvation.

Romans 10, verse 14, he wrote, How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?

And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?

And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And so we see Paul come to this point in his presentation of gospel ministry.

I am compelled, I am obligated to share the gospel with the dying world. And then he kind of sets reset. He goes back to the beginning in this treatise that he's about to present.

[2:17] The gospel itself through all 16 chapters of the book of Romans. And he starts with the wrath of God. It's a good place to start, isn't it?

We're going to do part one of that this week. And then for me, part two on Easter Sunday. It should be interesting. But he actually takes that through chapter 3, verse 20.

So pretty extensive. So we're going to be kind of settling on this idea for a while. The depravity of man and the wrath of God that is just toward a sinful man.

And mankind has, throughout the ages, asked the question, is man inherently good or is man inherently evil? And the message of scripture is that he is most certainly evil.

And the question then is to what degree? And that's what he speaks of here. And I'll go ahead and tell you the answer to that is absolutely evil. Man's heart is. In verse 1, he starts out talking about this wrath.

[3:22] This wrath of God. And he writes, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. So the wrath of God.

Not something that we typically like to talk about as Christians, is it? It's a very true thing that we need to know. We need to recognize that while God is both fully loved, he's also fully wrath as well. I thought Alethea Wade did a good job this morning of saying to us that God is loving toward his people, but he still had to punish sin. He punished sin in Christ. He didn't just let it go.

He didn't just say, you know what? I love you guys. It's okay. It's cool. He couldn't do that because he's fully just. He had to punish sin. He had to pour out his wrath for the sins that we've committed as his church.

And he did that on Christ. So he is fully loving, but he's fully just, vengeful, full of wrath towards sinful man.

[ 4 : 25 ] Asaph in Psalm 76, 7 wrote, But you, you are to be feared. Who can stand before you when once your anger is roused?

Another psalmist wrote about what God did to the defiant Egyptians who did not obey his commands to let the Israelites go. In Psalm 78, 49, and 50, he wrote, He let loose on them his burning anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, a company of destroying angels. He made a path for his anger. He did not spare them from death, but gave their lives over to the plague. In many ways, God has demonstrated his wrath on sinful man.

He destroyed all the inhabitants of the earth, except for eight people, in the flood, in Genesis 6 and 7. In the days of Abraham, he destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, except for Lot's family, in Genesis 18 and 19.

He destroyed Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea, Exodus 14. It's a theme that carries into the New Testament. Our beloved John 3, 16, For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

[ 5 : 39 ] It's followed later in the same chapter, in verse 36. With whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Paul, in his letter to Ephesus, states that the wrath of God will come on the sons of disobedience. Jesus himself speaks more about the coming judgment of his Father than the love of the Father. Why is that? Because we have to know the illness before we can treat it. We have to know where we stand and who we are before we can take the pill that cures.

And this wrath, where does it come from? It comes from heaven. It comes from our Heavenly Father. In my studies this week, I heard this story of a pagan farmer who would, on Sundays, plow his field outside of the meeting house where the church would meet.

He would make lots of noise intentionally. It was kind of a thumb of his nose at the religion of Christianity. He would make lots of racket and noise as he plowed his field. And he wrote a letter to the editor of the local newspaper and said, Why is it that my crops yield the greatest amount of produce?

[ 7 : 02 ] My crops. I'm so against Christianity, and yet I plow my field on Sunday, and my crops yield better than anyone else in this region. And very wisely, the editor posted his letter and wrote this one sentence at the bottom of it.

God does not settle all of his accounts in the month of October. That's the response to that. So the wrath of God is here now and coming from heaven.

The text says, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven. So how is it currently being revealed? In all kinds of ways, isn't it? We live in a very fallen world.

This morning, some of you might be a little hot or a little warm or a tad uncomfortable sitting in your seats. That's the effect of sin.

My knee hurts, and I have a bad headache this morning. That is the effect of sin. Find it and kill it. Those things, the sicknesses that we experience, the death that's around us, are all results of sin.

[ 8 : 12 ] This is awesome. This is totally disfusing. I'm not even nervous anymore now. There's no more nervousness in me at all. That was probably more embarrassing.

Okay, here we go. I got it.

The natural disasters that we experience in the world, the war, all that calamity that's going on in the world is the wrath of God towards sin. This world's not perfect at all, is it?

But also, the Greek term here, this wrath of God, is a bearing, an ongoing wrath. And ultimately, what Paul is talking about is the final judgment that is to come.

Those who are not found in Christ, the wrath of God, will eternally be poured out on them. It's a frightening thought, isn't it? Turn with me to Revelation chapter 19.

[ 9 : 10 ] I want you to see my Jesus. I hope he's yours as well.

Revelation chapter 19. We're going to start reading in verse 11. Speaking of the end of things, the final days of judgment.

Verse 11. John writes, And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True. And in righteousness he judges and makes war.

His eyes are like a flame of fire. On his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped or splattered in blood.

And the name by which he is called is the Word of God. And the armies of heaven arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron.

[10:21] He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

That is the wrath that is going to be revealed from heaven against those who are not found in Christ. Guess what? Those who are found in Christ is that army arrayed behind him in our fine linen, clean.

Because we don't have to do the fighting. But Christ will be the victor. And he's going to punish those who aren't found in him. And justly so. The text goes on and says that this just punishment is going to come against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

All of it. Not in varying degrees or forms, but all of it. And Romans 3.23 says, For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. So if you've not placed your faith in Christ, that's where you stand. Awaiting this judgment. Now those terms, ungodliness and unrighteousness, they're actually synonyms. But they have a little bit of a different feel in Greek.

[11:34] We don't have the words to quite express them, but they came close. Ungodliness refers to a lack of reverence for, devotion to, and worship of the true God.

And unrighteousness is kind of the end result of that. What comes out of the lack of devotion to and worship of the true God.

And these people suppress the truth. This truth that we're about to see, this revelation that God has given of himself, it is suppressed because of their hearts.

See Jeremiah 29.13. God writes, or God tells Jeremiah to write, You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

If we're to seek God, we will find him. But the problem is that we don't because in our righteousness we suppress the truth of God. Because men are not naturally inclined to seek God. Our nature, we are born enemies of God.

[12:37] We do not naturally pursue him. And it takes a change in our hearts for that to happen. So Paul starts out talking about the wrath of God.

And then he talks about the nature of these men. These men that will be recipients of this wrath. Humankind is who he's talking about.

And he gives us five characteristics of this fallen man that deserves God's wrath. And here they are. Let me give them to you and then we'll go through them. There's five of them.

The fallen man rejects God's revelation. Fails to give God glory. The glory due him. Is not thankful toward God.

Thinks foolishly. And worships wrongly. Don't go ahead. We'll go through them one at a time. The fallen man, number one.

[13:37] The fallen man rejects God's revelation. Let's find this in verse 19 and 20. Verse 19. For what can be known about God is plain to them.

Why? Because God has shown it to them. 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. Daniel, can I ask a favor? In my bag right behind you, that black bag, will you bring me in Carpenter's commentary? Something I wanted to read to you. And I don't have it with me. We'll read to you, though.

Job 38, 4 and 7. God responds to Job and says, Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell me if you have understanding. Thank you, sir. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know. Or who stretched the line upon it?

[14:37] On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone? When the morning star sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy. Who are you is what he's saying to Job.

Who are you to even question me, Job? And that's the very thing we do in unrighteousness. We question the God who laid the foundations of the earth.

Let me read this to you of MacArthur's commentary on this text. Try to stick with me. It's a little bit long. But here's this. At any given time, there are an average of 1,800 storms in operation in the world.

The energy needed to generate those storms amounts to the incredible figure of 1.3 billion, counting zeros, horsepower. 1.3 billion horsepower.

By comparison, a large earth-moving machine has 420 horsepower and requires 100 gallons of fuel a day to operate. Just one of those storms producing a rain of 4 inches over an area of 10,000 square miles would require energy equivalent to the burning of 640 million tons of coal to evaporate enough water for such a rain.

[15:49] And to cool those vapors and collect them in clouds would take another 800 million horsepower of refrigeration working night and day for 100 years. Agricultural studies have determined that the average farmer in Minnesota gets 407,000 gallons of rainwater per acre per year, free of charge, of course.

The state of Missouri has some 70,000 square miles and averages 38 inches of rain a year. That amount of water is equal to a lake 250 miles long, 60 miles wide, and 22 feet deep.

The U.S. Natural Museum has determined there are at least 10 million species of insects, including some 2,500 varieties of ants. There are about 5 billion birds in the United States, among which some species are able to fly 500 miles nonstop across the Gulf of Mexico.

Mallard ducks can fly 60 miles an hour. Isn't that crazy? Eagles, 100 miles an hour. And falcons can dive at speeds of 180 miles an hour. The Earth is 25,000 miles in circumference, weighs 6,588,6 billion tons, and hangs unsupported in space.

It spins at 1,000 miles per hour with absolute precision and careens through space around the sun at the speed of 1,000 miles per minute in an orbit 580 million miles long.

[17:10] The head of a comet may be from 10,000 to 1,000,000 miles long, having a tail 100,000,000,000 miles long, and traveling at speeds of 350 miles per second.

If the sun's radiated energy could be converted into horsepower, it would be the equivalent of 500,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 horsepower. Glad he didn't put zeros on that one. Each second, it consumes some 4 million tons of matter.

To travel at the speed of light across the Milky Way, the galaxy in which our solar system is located would take 125,000 years, and our galaxy is but one of millions. The human heart is about the size of its owner's fist.

An adult heart weighs less than half a pound, yet can do enough work in 12 hours to lift 65 tons one inch off the ground. A water molecule is composed of only three atoms, but if all the molecules in one drop of water were the size of a grain of sand, they could make a road one foot thick and half a mile wide that would stretch from Los Angeles to New York.

Amazingly, however, the atom itself is largely spaced. It's actual matter taking up only one trillionth of its volume. Point made. He goes on for another two pages.

[18:24] A little overkill. Isn't that phenomenal? Our God is phenomenal. And he's revealed all that to us in his created order. His immense power.

And so we're without excuse. The fact that God exists and we worship ourselves instead of him puts us in a bad place.

The text here says that we are without excuse. Psalm 19, 1 through 3, David writes, The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

Day to day pours out speech and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor are there words whose voice is not heard. So the very passing of the day and the passing of the night pours out the knowledge of God.

Phenomenal. Second, the fallen man fails to give glory to God. Verse 21a.

[19:31] The first part of it there. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God. They did not give to him or do not give to him the glory that is due him.

Scripture continually admonishes man to glorify God. Psalm 29, 1 and 2 says, Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name. Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness. 1

Corinthians 10, 31. So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

And one day, 24 elders will fall down before Christ on his heavenly throne and declare, Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power.

For you created all things and by your will they existed and were created. So all honor, all glory belongs to God. The fallen man gives him none.

[ 20 : 33 ] Third, the fallen man is not thankful. Toward God. Verse 21, B, the middle of it. Or give thanks to him.

Which is to be expected. Right? The man who doesn't honor God, doesn't recognize him in his created order, obviously will not give thanks to him.

Acts 14, 15 and 17. This is a story of Paul at Lystra after they've healed a crippled man. And everybody comes to him and Barnabas and begin to worship him.

They think there's Zeus and Hermes. And he says, men, why are you doing these things? We also are men of like nature with you. And we bring you good news that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness. For he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

[ 21 : 46 ] Everything we have, all of it, comes from God. The fallen man doesn't recognize that at all. I'm afraid we don't at times either.

Number four. The fallen man thinks foolishly. The last part of verse 21 and verse 22.

But they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools. So the fallen man thinks he knows what's going on.

We've got a lot of that in the world around us, don't we? We live in America where people tend to be more educated than others in the world. There is a lot of philosophy and psychology out there that claims to be wise, but is altogether foolish because it's contrary to the Scriptures.

In Colossians 2.8, Paul says, See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

[ 22 : 55 ] All truth is found in Christ. Hear that. All truth is found in Christ. There is no theory of this world that is true, that contradicts our Savior.

And their foolish hearts were darkened. Something I wrestled with a little bit. This whole text, actually, I wrestled with a tad. But this phrase here simply means that their futile thinking has led them further down the road of sin.

It has made them more estranged from God because of their foolishness, their foolish thinking. And that's what he's talking about when he says their foolish hearts were darkened.

Number five, the fallen man worships wrongly. Verse 23 says, And exchange the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

There's the indictment in that. Exchange the glory of the immortal God, the God who goes on for eternity, the God that is worthy to be praised for things that are mortal and unworthy of our praise.

[ 24 : 12 ] It's outside of our text, but for next week, Paul writes that they serve the creature rather than the creator. Do you hear the foolishness in that?

The foolish minds that would do such a thing? It's where we were before we found ourselves in Christ. It's probably where we are often now.

Humanistic sociologists, philosophers, and theologians say that religion is an upward climb. From primitive ignorance. From primitive chaos.

They say that religion is man's attempt to come out of those things. Ascending through animism to polytheism to monotheism.

It's been this climb throughout history. Sadly, human religion of every sort is a downward movement away from God. It's a downward movement.

[ 25 : 10 ] It takes us further from. Even those of us who are found in Christ. Our religion makes us estranged from Him. Right? It's the relationship that we have with Him that is endearing and brings us close.

We fall into that trap so often. So we turn the relational aspect of God into a religion. We begin to follow our rules again and dress a certain way and do certain things.

And we have to have it just so. Even in the Reformed tradition. And I think we do a ton of things really right. We begin to worship those things rather than the God of those things.

Men's religions do not reflect their highest endeavors. But their lowest depravity. Religion is the search for God.

Those of us in Christ, we found Him. We don't need religion anymore. Have you ever played that game? I don't really know what to call it.

[ 26 : 13 ] Hot or cold, maybe. Is that what it's called? Somebody's trying to find something. A kid's trying to find something. He says, you're getting hotter. You're getting hotter. You're getting hotter. You're burning up. You're burning up. Or Arctic temperatures. You're in Antarctica. It's so cold.

Now, have you ever played that game with a kid and totally confused them? Just made it super random? You just make up what's going on. You're getting hotter. You're getting hotter. No, you're colder, colder. And they are standing on the spot that should be.

And you're just leading them all around the room. It's really quite fun. But that's religion. It seeks to take us to God.

But in fact, it just confuses us terribly. And the fallen man worships something. We were all created to worship. Everyone's religious.

Even the atheist is religious. We're all religious in some way. We all have something that we worship. Whether it's material goods. Or false gods.

[ 27 : 07 ] Or our families. Our own ideologies. We have something that we worship. And you see here, first of man. Then of other effigies he's talking about.

But all of it is idolatry. All of it seeks to take Christ off the throne. And put us in some way back onto it.

It's a little poem by a man named J.H. He wrote, And still from him we turn away. And fill our hearts with worthless things.

The fires of greed melt the clay. And forth the idle springs. Ambition's flame and passion's heart. By wondrous alchemy transmute earth's dross.

To raise some gilded brute. To fill Jehovah's seat. Isn't that cutting? It is to me. So the fallen man is these five things.

[ 28 : 10 ] Is characterized by them. And this morning if you find yourself in that place. I have good news for you. If you are a Christian.

You ought to examine yourself by these things. Because this is the way the fallen man lives. It's not the way the children of God live. But don't we so often do all these things?

At moments in all of our lives. I could look into your life. And you would look like this man. If we are found in Christ. We ought to look the opposite. Of this man.

So for us as Christians. Praise God. The wrath of God doesn't abide on us. Even though we live this way sometimes. The wrath of God doesn't abide on us.

But hear the gospel. In some verses that are later on in Romans. Romans chapter 5 verses 6 through 9. All right.

[ 29 : 18 ] For while we were still weak. At the right time Christ died. For the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person. Though perhaps for a good person.

One would dare even to die. Or neither of those two. But God shows his love for us. And that while we were still sinners. Christ died. For us.

Since therefore we have now been justified. By his blood. Much more shall we be saved by him. From the wrath. Of God. And that's the gospel.

Nothing in this world. Will bring us close to God. Except for Christ. That's it. And all of us. Apart from Christ. Are fallen. Far off from him. Which is punishment in and of itself.

But his wrath also. Is coming to abide on us. I hope this morning you're found in Christ. As you are exempt from that punishment. That Christ himself has already bore the wrath of God for you.

[ 30 : 20 ] On your behalf. If you're one of those. And you're living like the fallen man. Repent. Place your faith. Back in Christ.

Turn back. To him. If you're feeling the conviction. That you're not found in Christ. Place your faith in the gospel. It's really pretty simple.

If you're feeling the conviction. Of a life lived this way. You're an enemy of God. It's the spirit of God working within you.

Repent. Say to God. God. I have been your enemy. And I need Christ to draw near to you. I plead with you this morning.

Repent and believe. You will not. Regret it. It will not buy you. A life of. Pleasures. And money. But it will buy you.

[ 31 : 19 ] A life of joy. I have been set free. From the wrath of God. Even though I have a headache. And my knee hurts this morning. Because I have joy in Christ. I have Christ. And that is better than all.

Those things. Let's pray together.