

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Wrath of God

Scripture: Romans 1:18

Code: 45-09

Let's look together this evening at the first chapter of Romans. Tonight we're going to examine 1:18. And I believe as we examine this very critical verse, we find the key that unlocks the gospel, the starting point of evangelism.

Now the apostle Paul has announced his theme in verses 16 and 17 as we saw last week. He says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." And that really is his theme. He called it "the gospel of God" in verse 1 because God is its source, and "the gospel of Christ" in verse 16 because Christ is its culmination. And he says he is "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For in it is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

We saw that that was in condensed form the thesis or the theme of the entire epistle to the Romans. And now as he moves to verse 18, he begins to unfold in great detail the substance of that theme, to help the Christian reader to understand the significance and the meaning of the fullness of the gospel of Christ. And it all begins in verse 18 with this statement. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

The gospel message begins with a statement about the wrath of God. Frankly that's diametrically opposed to most of our evangelistic technique. Most of our contemporary evangelism purposely avoids that theme. We talk about love, and we talk about happiness, and we talk about abundant living, and we talk about forgiveness, and we talk about joy, we talk about peace. And we offer people all of those things and ask them if they wouldn't like to have all of those things. But we really very rarely talk about judgment.

And I wonder in all of the times that you have presented the gospel to somebody how many times did you introduce it by saying, "By the way, did you know that the wrath of God is revealed against your ungodliness?" I suppose Dale Carnegie has even affected our gospel presentations. We are in such a hurry to win friends and influence people that sometimes we bypass the starting point.

From Paul's perspective, fear becomes the first pressure applied to evil men. Let them know about the wrath of God. Now admittedly, the wrath of God is a hard subject, and I am not here to tell you that it's an easy one. I find it myself very difficult to begin in speaking to people about Christ at this point. And yet, it is the beginning of the gospel and the proper preparation for the announcement of

grace.

How can people understand anything about love if they don't understand God's hate? How can they understand anything about His grace if they don't know about His law? How can they understand forgiveness if they don't understand the penalty of sin? Men cannot understand. They cannot seek grace and salvation unless they are affected with the dread of the wrath of God that is upon them. Unless men sense they are in grave danger, there's no pressure applied to them to change.

Now, sometimes when you talk about God being a God of wrath, certain people get disturbed. And they don't understand how God can be a God of anger, and God can be a God of wrath, and God can be a God of fury, a God of terror. But that's because they don't understand God. Let's see if we can't help ourselves to a deeper understanding of His wrath in perspective with all of His other attributes.

God's attributes are balanced in His divine perfection. And they are perfectly balanced. If God did not have wrath, and God did not have anger, then He would not be God. God is perfect in love, on the one hand, and He is equally perfect in hate, on the other hand. Just as totally as He loves, so totally does He hate. As His love is unmixed, so is His hate unmixed.

Of Christ, it says in Hebrews 1:9, "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity." And there is that perfect balance in the nature of God. As I mentioned, one of the tragedies of Christianity in our time is a failure to preach the hatred of God, the judgment of God. We're so saccharine. We're so sentimental. We're so kind of mushy in our Christianity. When is the last time you heard a new song on the wrath of God? Heard one lately? I haven't.

Just to prove a point in my own mind I have an old Psalter, an old hymnal from the end of the 19th century. And I pulled it off the shelf and started to go through the hymnal, and I found hymn, after hymn, after hymn on the wrath of God, on the anger of God, on the vengeance of God, on the judgment of God. Hymns that sounded very much like the imprecatory Psalms, where the psalmist is asking God to come down and condemn His enemies.

People don't write hymns like that anymore. People don't extol the wrath of God. We don't want to talk about that in our Madison Avenue approach to presenting the message. But we will never understand at all the profound reality of God's love until we comprehend His hate. There has to be a very clear delineation of what it is that God hates.

And may I add that it is not to say that God doesn't love, but it is to say that you'll never understand how great His love is unless you know how great His hate is. I mean, if you understand that God hates sin so profoundly, then you will find it all the more amazing that He can love sinners. So that without an understanding of His hate, His love is crippled, too, in our thinking. "Love" and "grace," our favorite terms, are void of meaning if God does not hate.

Now in spite of our aversion to seeing God as a God of hate and a God of wrath, the Scriptures clearly emphasize this, and I want to take you on a kind of a jet tour through some scriptures.

Psalm 2:1. "Why do the nations rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us."

In other words, let's get God. Let's do away with God, do away with His rule. He intimidates us. Let's eliminate Him. "But He that sits in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His great displeasure." Verse 12 says, "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little." In other words, when God just gets a little angry people perish.

Look at Psalm 76, another illustration. This is reflecting back on the judgment of God upon the Egyptian army. It says in Psalm 76:6, "At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse are cast into a deep sleep. Thou, even thou, art to be feared: and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry? Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven; the earth feared, and was still, when God arose to judgment."

Look at Psalm 78:49. And here is God's wrath poured out against the enemies of Israel again, verse 49. "He cast upon them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them. He made a way to His anger; he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence; And smote all the firstborn in Egypt; the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham." God was angry. God was fierce. God had wrath. God had indignation. And God brought trouble, very severe.

Psalm 90:7, it says - and this speaks of man as he stands before a holy God, "For we are consumed by Thine anger, and by Thine wrath are we troubled." Verse 11, "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is Thy wrath." This is the hymn book of Israel. And I would hasten to add that they had hymns about God's wrath. It was equally a part of God's nature.

The prophets spoke often of the wrath of God, the judgment of God. In Isaiah 9:19 it says, "Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts is the land darkened - " and then this amazing statement " - and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire."

Jeremiah also spoke of the wrath of God, 7:20. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, Mine anger and My fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched."

Ezekiel, the prophet of God, 7:19 says that, “not their gold, nor their silver shall be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord: they shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their stomachs: because it is the stumblingblock of their iniquity.”

Now those are just a few passages. But the Bible is filled with statements about the wrath of God. You see His wrath exemplified in the Old Testament: Against the old world when He brought the flood; against the people at the tower of Babel; against the Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain; against the Egyptians; on many occasions against the Israelites; against the enemies of Israel. You see His wrath poured out against Nadab and the others, against the spies, against Aaron and Miriam, against Abimelech, against the family of Saul, against Sennacherib, and it goes on and on.

You say, “Well, that’s the Old Testament.” That’s right. But God doesn’t change. The same thing is true in the New Testament, as well. You see the wrath of God. In John chapter 3, John, that wonderful gospel written by a man of love, that gospel that presents the Lord Jesus Christ in all His wonder and majesty and beauty, is yet a gospel that speaks of God’s wrath.

John talks about it in several places, how that God’s wrath will be poured out. But one particular one is at the end of the third chapter, the last verse. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him.” It is not well with people who do not know Christ. It is not well with them. The wrath of God abides on them.

And in the very epistle which is before us, Romans, Paul points out the wrath of God when in 9:22 he says, “What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?”

And so it goes. In Ephesians 5:6, “Let no man deceive you with vain words: because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience.” The Bible says God will damn unbelieving men.

Colossians chapter 3 says the very same thing. Second Thessalonians chapter 1 is perhaps the most vivid of all. It talks about God coming “in flaming fire and taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel, who will be punished with an everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of His power.”

God is a God of wrath, people. He’s a God of anger. Now does that sound like a poor choice of starting points for the gospel? Think about it. The bad news has to come before the good news, doesn’t it? It’s kind of like going to the doctor and having the doctor say to you, “I have bad news. You have a fatal illness that has killed many people. But, I have good news. A cure has been found, and I have it right here.” See, the good news means nothing without the bad news, right? You have to

diagnose the disease before the cure means anything.

The bad news is God hates. The good news is God loves. But you have to start with His hate. First the diagnosis, then the cure.

Now look again at verse 18, it says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven." Why is that "for" there? What is that there for? Well, it connects us to the previous passage. The previous passage says justification is by faith alone. Why? "Because the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." In other words, what that verse says is all men hold the truth unrighteously and are under the wrath of God.

Therefore, they have no capacity to justify themselves. So justification has to be by faith, because all men, left to their own efforts, are under the wrath. Do you see? Justification is by faith. It has to be. It can't be by works because by works all men are under wrath.

Paul says it another way. He says, "For all have sinned and - " what? " - come short of the glory of God."

In Ephesians 2 it says, "And you who were dead in trespasses and sins." That's the way it is with everyone. "In time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that works in the children of disobedience: Among whom we all had our manner of life - " all of us " - in times past and the lust of the flesh, desires of the flesh, and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath."

Everybody born into this world is a child of wrath. Everybody born into this world is a victim of lust and desire toward evil things. Everyone is born spiritually dead. "We are all," says Paul, "condemned already - " or says John, rather " - condemned already because we believe not in Christ."

Frankly, folks, sentence has already been passed. The whole human race is damned to hell. We are all children of wrath under the judgment of God. Man is born condemned. All men are born into the world under the wrath.

So, we start with this classic statement. And just to give you a focus, the passage on the condemnation of the human race starts in 1:18 and goes all the way to 3:20. So, we're going to be in it for a while, and you're going to see some things about why people do what they do maybe you never saw before.

But let's begin by just looking at the concept of wrath in verse 18, and this gives us an absolutely comprehensive perspective on it. Six features of the wrath are presented here. You can follow your outline, and it will help you to keep your focus on those.

First, the quality of wrath, the quality, the essence of it. What kind of wrath is it? Well, it is the wrath of God. It is divine wrath, and that is a very important beginning. It is divine wrath. It isn't like anything else that we know in this world. It isn't like your wrath or my wrath. It isn't like when we get angry. It isn't like when we get mad. We get angry and we get mad when we are offended. And, frankly, we have pride in the way. Our passion, our anger, and our wrath is not like this. This is the wrath of God.

And like every other attribute of God, it is as perfect as His holy person. His wrath is righteous wrath. It is the right kind of wrath. It is holy wrath. The passion that we call "anger" in this world, the thing that we call "wrath" in this human world is always reflective of the evil heart of man. But we must not impose that on God.

One writer said, "We cannot think with full consistency of God in terms of the highest human ideals of personality and yet attribute to Him the rational passion of anger." In other words, this writer was saying, "God could never be angry because we know anger is a bad thing." But he is simply trying to say that God's like us, and He's not. Don't push our concept of anger on God. God is angry in a holy way, in a perfect way. God's anger is not some capricious, irrational rage.

In fact, let me go a step further. And you're getting a lesson in theology proper here about the nature of God. God could not be God and be holy, and be wholly good if He didn't react to evil. Do you understand that? He has to. He can't be God. You cannot be holy and tolerate unholiness. It can't be done. That's why Habakkuk the prophet said, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look upon iniquity." God can't tolerate it. And I'll tell you something. The more Godlike you become, the more angry you will get at certain things.

Even in this warped world of men, indignation against wickedness is essential of human goodness. We expect people to get mad about certain injustice. For God is infinitely beyond that, because even when we get mad about the right things it's usually polluted by our sinfulness.

A classic illustration was Jesus in John 2 cleansing the temple. Made a whip and just started whipping people all out of the temple. I mean, that's a very dramatic scene. Do you want to know something? That was His first public act in Jerusalem. That is not the way you start a crusade. You don't go into the religious places, take a whip, and start flagellating everybody, and overturning tables, and crying about their sin. You'll never get a crowd that way. You've got to send the advance committee, make it sound like harps and flowers. Jesus was furious because God was being dishonored. There was dishonesty there, there was cheating, and lying, and extortion, and desecration.

So, don't look at the low, irrational, selfish anger of men, and then push that off on God. The wrath of God is always perfect, always. The wrath of men is always somehow compromised by the presence

of sin.

Just to kind of fill up your thinking, listen to what the psalmist wrote. "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance. He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked." Is that vivid?

You say, "Wait a minute. You mean the righteous are so excited about God's judgment that they want to wash their feet in the blood of the wicked?" "So that a man will say, 'Verily, there is a reward for the righteous. Verily He is a God that judgeth in the earth.'" In other words, when God judges it is so right, it is so perfect, it is so absolutely holy that God's people are seen as if they were washing their feet in the blood of the unrighteous. Incredible concept.

In Lamentations chapter 1, "The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against His commandment: hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow." In other words, God is judging but it's okay. I deserve it. He's righteous.

Remember what happened to Achan? God said, "When you go in to take Jericho, don't steal anything." And Achan just stole everything in sight, just disobeyed. He came back and buried it all in the ground in the middle of his tent. Joshua went to him and said, "Confess your sin." Joshua 7:19, "Confess your sin and give glory to God." Now what did he mean by that? He meant that Achan was really going to get it. I mean, he was going to get it, and he did get it. You know what happened? He died and all his family with him. Then they must have been implicated in the whole operation.

But he says, "Before you get your due judgment from God, you confess your sin." In other words, you say, "I am guilty. What God does to me is the proper reaction of His holiness." You see? That's the issue. In other words, don't you ever impune God as if He did something impure. Even when God is angry it is the right expression of His utter holiness.

And we see that in Romans. We see it right where we are. The wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness. And we're going to see it over and over again in chapter 2, and in chapter 3, that God's righteousness or God's judgment is a righteous judgment.

I might just add here the word is org and it is a settled indignation not a momentary fury. God doesn't blow His cork, God doesn't just fly off the handle. It is a settled hatred by one who could never be good and loving unless He totally hated evil. The two are inseparable. You have both or neither.

Trench, the great commentator on language in the Word of God said, "Nor can there be a surer or sadder token of an utterly prostrate moral condition than the not being able to be angry with sin and sinners."

And old saint by the name of Fuller wrote this. "Anger is one of the sinews of the soul. He that lacks it hath a maimed mind, and with Jacob sinews shrunk in the hollow of his thigh, must limp."

Thomas Watson says, "Is God so infinitely holy? Then see how unlike to God sin is. Sin is an unclean thing. It is called an 'abomination.' God has no mixture of evil in Him. Sin has no mixture of good. It is the spirit in quintessence of evil. It turns good into evil. It has deflowered the virgin soul, made it red with guilt and black with filth. It is called 'the accursed thing.' No wonder therefore that God hates sin." He's right. So the quality of wrath is that it is a wrath of God, and that is different than any other kind.

Secondly, the time of wrath. Look what it says. "For the wrath of God is revealed," is revealed. What does he mean "is revealed"? Literally "is being constantly revealed." When is the time of God's wrath? It's constantly being revealed. God's wrath is constantly being manifest. The verb apokalupt, from which we get apokalupsis or "apocalypse," means "to uncover, to bring to light, to make manifest, to make known." God's wrath is always being made known. It's visible to all of human history.

It was revealed in the garden, wasn't it? When Adam and Eve sinned and immediately the sentence of death was passed, the earth was cursed, and they were thrown out of paradise. And the world had a great beginning lesson on the fact that God hates sin.

It was revealed in the flood when God drowned the whole human race except for eight faithful souls. It was revealed in the drowning of Pharaoh's army. It was revealed in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire from heaven. It was revealed in the curse of the law on every transgressor. It was revealed in the institution of the sacrificial system, and all of the services of the Mosaic Law. In fact, the whole creation groans and travails in pain under the judgment of God waiting for redemption.

You know that even the laws of men made against evil doers reveal the wrath of God? For all laws are based upon the mind of God. No one can plead ignorance because the wrath of God has been revealed throughout human history.

And above all, I believe the greatest demonstration of the wrath of God ever given was given on Calvary's cross. God hates so deeply sin that He actually allowed His own Son to be put to death, the greatest manifestation of the wrath of God. He poured out His fury on His own beloved Son. He would not hold it back even from His own Son. That's how He hated sin.

Jeffrey Wilson, the British commentator, writes, "God is no idle spectator of world events. He is dynamically active in human affairs. The conviction of sin is constantly punctuated by divine judgment." And the judgment on the cross sums up the world's history.

So what is the time of the wrath of God? It's constantly being revealed, all the time, all the time. Every time you turn around, you see it. People live and die. Nations rise and fall. God judges sin.

You say to yourself as I said to myself about this point in my study, "But now, wait a minute. There are some people who seem to kind of prosper in spite of this, right? There are some wicked people who seem to do so well." And you ask yourself the question "How can they live and get away with it?" I mean, why does God let them live such wretched, dissolute, vile, sinful lives? Well, don't forget Psalm 9:16 says, "The Lord is known by the judgment which He executeth."

It will come. If God lets men prosper for a while in their sin, His bowl of wrath is just all the while filling up. If He lets them sin for a while it's just that He's sharpening the sword. The longer God pulls back the bow, the deeper the arrow plunges when He releases it. Judgment will come.

The story goes that the godly farmers in a western community were greatly shocked one summer Sunday morning when they drove to the little church in the country. They found the man who owned the 40 acres across from the church was in the middle of plowing his field, turning the furrows. And he'd been doing it all day and ignored the fact that it was the Lord's Day.

The people went on into the church and all the while they were in church they could hear the noise of all of his tractors. And so they were deeply concerned. He had worked all his other fields and purposely chosen to work the one by the church on Sunday to prove a point. He wrote a letter to the editor of a local paper, and pointed out that he had done all this on Sunday, and yet he had the highest yield per acre of any farm in the county. And he asked the editor how the Christians could explain this. He didn't feel God was involved at all.

The editor with great common sense printed the letter and followed it with this simple statement. "God does not settle all His accounts in the month of October."

The quality of wrath? It's God's wrath. That's different than any other kind. The time? constantly being revealed. The source? Where's the source of this wrath? Look what it says. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven." Heaven is the source. The wrath of God comes from heaven. Earth is dominated by heaven. Wrath is dynamically effectively operative in the world of men. It comes from the throne of God.

Now there are basically two ways that heaven reveals the wrath of God. Think with me on these. The first is what I call moral order, and the second we'll call personal action. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven, first of all, through moral order. In other words, when God made the world - the physical and the moral world - He built into it certain laws.

If you climb a tall building and jump off you go down. It doesn't matter what you want to do, you go down. It doesn't matter what you think you're going to do. You still go down. The law of gravity. There are laws. You go in a car 80 miles an hour, run into a concrete wall, and a law immediately takes

affect. The law of an irresistible force and an immovable object. There are laws in the physical world. There are laws in the spiritual world. And God has built into the world moral law. It's the laws of consequence, if you will.

And I believe there's a certain moral order in the universe. It's a certain inevitability. To put it into modern terminology we could say, "There's a moral order in the world and when you violate that moral law, consequences immediately take place."

J. A. Froude, the historian, said, "One lesson and one lesson alone, history may be said to repeat with distinctness that the world is built somehow on moral foundations, and in the long run it is well with the good, and in the long run it is ill with the wicked."

Now the wrath is revealed from heaven, then, first of all in the moral order. I mean, you do things that are immoral and you pay a price, you pay a price. Because the world is made on moral law. You live a dissolute life, degenerate, evil life, and there will be consequences. And it's from heaven because heaven made the rules.

But secondly - and it goes beyond that - the wrath of God is not simply confined to moral order. There is also personal activity on God's part. God is not just a cosmic force who made a law and just let it run its course. God gets involved. It is not just automatic judgment by an anonymous cosmic computer. God is involved, and the Bible shows a very intense personal reaction to sin within the heart of the divine being. Yes, there's moral order. But yes, there's a real personal involvement.

Let me just give you an illustration. And I've got a lot of scriptures I could show you, but let me just give you a quick one in Psalm 7:11. It says in verse 11, "God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry." God is angry. The Bible does say that God is angry. There's not just a moral order, God is angry. And He's not angry now and then. He's angry with the wicked how often? "Every day." You say, "Really?" Oh yeah, He's angry every day. God is angry every day. God gets angry.

There is moral law, moral order, but there's also personal act, as God expresses the wrath of a holy nature. And it comes from heaven because heaven has established the moral order, and it is from the throne of God that that wrath comes.

Fourth, the nature of wrath. What is the nature of wrath? What kind of wrath is this? Well, very simply stated, "the wrath of God - " that's its quality " - is revealed - " that's its time, constantly revealed " - from heaven - " that's its source " - against ungodliness and unrighteousness of men - "

that's its nature. It is wrath against sin. You knew that. It's not an uncontrolled, irrational fury. God is not like a criminal who takes his vengeance out on the nearest person. It is discriminated. It is carefully pointed at the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men, asebeia and adikia. What do these

words mean? “Ungodliness” and “unrighteousness.”

The first word - although they really overlap and you could call them synonyms in the purest sense - he’s simply just using two words to show us that God is angry about sin. But there are some shades of meaning that I think are interesting. The first word refers to “ungodliness.” And that focuses on the relationship to God. God is angry because men are not rightly related to Him. They are ungodly, you see? They’re not godly. Men are ungodly.

In Jude it says God is going to “come and execute judgment on all, and convict all that are ungodly among them, of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed.” Three “ungodlies” in a row. And then it says, “And of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.” Four in one verse, “ungodly,” not rightly related to God.

It refers to impiety toward God. It refers to a lack of reverence, a lack of devotion, a lack of worship. And it leads to idolatry. It views sin as a failure to reverence God.

The second word, “unrighteousness,” while it encompasses the first concept as well, leans toward the result of the first word. When you are not rightly related to God and don’t reverence God properly, then your transactions with everyone else around you aren’t right, either. And so ungodliness leads to unrighteousness.

All sin, you see, first attacks God’s majesty, and then His law. And the reason - and I really believe this - the reason men treat men the way they do is because they treat God the way they do. Ungodliness leads to unrighteousness. People say, “Oh, what’s happening? All the murders, and all the crimes, and all the horrible things that are going on. Why is so man so inhumane to man?” It’s because he is so unrelated to God. All human relationships and all human transactions are corrupted. And we’ll see more about that in the 2nd and 3rd chapter, as well as the remainder of the 1st chapter.

So, God’s wrath is set against sin. Thomas Watson says, “Sin is to the soul as rust is to gold, as stain is to beauty.” Sin in the Scripture is called a menstruous cloth. It’s called a plague sore. Joshua’s filthy garments were a hieroglyphic of sin. And you know as well as I how God hates sin.

In fact, do you know that that’s the only thing God hates? That’s right. Did you know that? And no man will ever enter His presence with sin.

Fifthly, the extent of wrath. And this is a very brief point. You say, “Well, I’m a pretty good guy. I mean, this - who you talking to, MacArthur? It’s not me. I belong to the Royal Order of the Goats. I give to charity. I mean, I’m a basically a good person.” Well, okay, “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against - ” what’s the next word? “ - all.” All? All. “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”

Well, some people are better than others, but nobody makes it. I used to use the illustration of everybody going down to the beach and trying to jump to Catalina. Yeah, we'll give you a running start, only 26 miles. You can run as fast as you want and as long as you want, and jump. Some of us would get out about 6 feet, some of us might be stupendous broad jumpers and jump 26 feet, but nobody would get there.

Sure people are different. Some appear better than others. It's too far to jump, and so "all ungodliness and unrighteous of men." Nobody escapes, no one. This only needs to be a brief point because Scripture is so clear. You can't escape.

I'm going to read you just something. You don't need to turn to it. Just listen to it. Ezekiel 17:15, talking about Zedekiah, who made a covenant with God and then decided to break it, and reached out to Egypt to help him when all he really needed was God. And that was his promise. "But he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, they might give him horses and many people." In other words, instead of trusting God, he decided he needed Egypt's help. And then it says now since he did that, "Shall he prosper? shall he escape? Shall he break the covenant and be delivered?" Now listen to this. "As I live, saith the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwells who made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he broke, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die." He'll not escape. Shall he escape? "As I live" the answer is no.

I don't care who you are. The faintest trace of ungodliness and unrighteousness brings you under the wrath of God. And shall you escape? No. No. Inescapability.

Finally, we've seen the quality of wrath, the time of wrath, the source of wrath, the nature of wrath, the extent of wrath, and now the cause of wrath.

You say, "How can God hold all these poor people responsible? I mean, I mean I was born into a sinful family, what do I know?" Oh, you'd be surprised what you know. The end of verse 18. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the - " what? " - the truth in unrighteousness."

Now this opens up the entire next section, and next Sunday night is going to be one of the most definitive messages probably you've ever heard as we look at the decline and fall of man. But he says the real problem and the cause of wrath is that "men hold the truth in unrighteousness." Literally, we would read it this way. "Men who are constantly attempting to suppress the truth by their sin." Sin just is in the heart of man so strongly that it assaults the truth.

People say, "What about the heathen? What about this and what about that?" Listen, the truth is there, as he will point out in the next passage, but men suppress it. Sin always assaults the truth. The

fundamental truth of God and His Word is assaulted. There's always an attempt to suppress it, to bury it, to obliterate it. It is the essence of sin, however, that the attempt is always futile. And men live with guilt in spite of their attempt.

The knowledge of God is all over. And if the knowledge of God – listen - that I believe is available to every human being on the earth, I don't care how obscure that individual is or how remote. I believe the knowledge of God is available, and if it does its legitimate work, and man allows it to do that legitimate work, it will keep a man from the excesses of sin and lead that man to God.

But men suppress it. They love darkness rather than what? Light. Because what? Their deeds are evil. The fool is always saying, "There is no God." And why does he say that? Because he doesn't want there to be a God because if there's a God, he's in trouble.

It says in Psalm 14:1, "The fool says in his heart, There is no God." Why? "They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good." I'm sure they don't want there to be a God to call them to accountability. Man tries to postulate that there is no God, and if he doesn't do that he says, "Well, I'll invent a God who can tolerate my sin." And he clearly avoids the true voice of God.

But I really believe that there's no problem with the people who ask the question, How are the heathen to know? I believe that God has revealed Himself to every individual, and if individuals, wherever they are, no matter how remote they are, do not suppress that truth by the love of sin, that truth will protect them from the excesses of sin, and eventually lead them to the truth of God by His gracious providence. But men don't do that. They avoid the truth of God.

All men possess enough of the germs of divine truth and moral law to preserve them from hell, but they've halted the growth and development of those by the love of sin. And the wrath of God waits.

If you're not a Christian the wrath of God waits for you. Dr. Barnhouse had an apt illustration, and I'll close with this. He said, "The wrath of God is like a great water impounded behind a dam." He said, "I can remember the first time I ever saw Hoover Dam, one of the greatest of all dams on earth. It has been thrown across the waters of the Colorado River, and these waters have backed up for miles and penetrated into every little cove and valley.

"And thus it has been with the wrath of God. The first time there was ever a sin committed, the wrath of God was stored up against that sin. And as men lived upon the earth and as their hearts grew more wicked and the outbreak of their sin more violent, the store of wrath grew greater and greater, held back by the patience of God, which lies across the valley of His judgment like a great dam across the river.

“And in His eternal foreknowledge, God the Father foresaw all of the sin that would be committed after the time of Christ, your sin and my sin, and He stored His wrath against it behind the dam of His patience. And the wrath of God against sin that even today has not yet been committed is also stored up waiting for the day when His patience shall burst into its holy end. “For thousands of years, that dam has held and God has held back His wrath. Occasionally throughout human history He stooped to dip His hand into the pent up flood and pour a few drops of wrath on some especially vicious outbreak of rebellion. But for the most part, God seemed to overlook the sins of man in the centuries before the cross. It looked maybe as if sin was tolerated, but it was just piling up.”

You know, the dam broke one day, and it broke at Calvary. And it broke on Christ and drowned Him in all the sea of sin. And it will break again, and it will drown all those men who are not in Christ. Christ took the judgment for those who believe. For those who do not believe, they will take their own judgment. And the wrath of God awaits them. Because they hold the truth, no matter what they claim, but they hold it, and suppress it because of their sin.

Now listen, that is where the gospel begins. But remember, there is good news, and the good news is Christ has taken the full fury of God’s wrath if you’ll accept His gracious substitution for you.

Father, we’re grateful tonight that we’ve been able to look at this theme; hard, fearful and yet so important. It’s easy for us to get callous. Help us to be as if this were the first time we ever heard this, to rush out to warn men and women, young people of coming wrath.

May no one leave this place tonight under judgment, condemnation, but may they accept the gracious provision of Christ who took that stored up dam of fury at Calvary’s cross, and may they climb to that island of safety, so that when the dam breaks again at the great white throne they’ll already have entered into the paradise prepared for them.

While your heads are bowed for just a moment, let me encourage you that if you don’t know our Lord Jesus Christ tonight, this would be the time. No time like the present. No one knows how much time you have. This is a serious message, very serious. More serious than any message I could give, but that’s where we are in the text. And I know the Lord has purpose for it. Maybe you’re that purpose. In the silence of your heart you can open your life to Christ. Ask Him to remove you from the wrath to come. Accept the fact that He bore your sin in His own body on the cross, and freed you if you put your faith in Him.

Father, may this be a night of salvation in the hearts of many, not just in this place but all around this country and the world where Your name is lifted up. May this be a day when heaven rejoices over souls that entered the kingdom, stepped out from under the wrath of God into the protecting love of Christ.

God, we know You're angry over sin. We know how You hate sin but O how You must love to have hated sin so much and yet put it all on the One You loved, Your own Son the Lord Jesus, for us. O how You must love. Thank You for that love, forgiving love, merciful love, gracious love.

We pray that no one will leave without receiving that from Your good, faithful hand. We thank You for this time together. We praise You for all that You've accomplished. In Christ's name, amen.

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