

West Valley Church
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Romans: Faith, Family, Fullness

Part Two

We are just starting our summer series, going through Paul's letter to the Romans. It's all streamed and saved online too, so if you're gone you don't have it miss one. Today we are going to be looking at the end of chapter 1, chapter 2, and a few verses in chapter 3. It's a large chunk of scripture so I'm going to quote some verses and paraphrase others. So if you want to go back and study it on your own this week, that is where we'll be. Last week Pastor Mike shared the first half of Romans chapter 1. Paul starts off with a nice little greeting, and thanks God for the Romans, and says "grace and peace to you", he's so sweet, well in v18, Paul jumps right in to confront the Romans about their sin, their godlessness, wickedness, and the coming wrath of God. Fun sermon on God's wrath? Well hang with me, it's not all about that. Part of the problem, for the Romans, is that they have known what to do but they aren't doing it. Paul writes in verse 20 saying:

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. (Romans 1:20)

We are without excuse because we see God at work in our lives all around us. Creation points back to him. If you go camping this summer, you'll notice God everywhere around us. Mt Rainer, the ocean, even here in Yakima the sunrise, plants growing, even the dry brown hills. In the world, we can see God. In the world we also see that suffering follows sin. If we break the laws of agriculture and you do not water enough, or plant at the wrong time, your harvest fails. If you break the laws of architecture and don't have a good foundation, your building collapses. If you break the laws of health and don't eat right or drink water, your body suffers. Paul is saying "look at the world, see how it is constructed; from creation, we know God's power and who He is." So no excuses. Paul says they knew there was a creator, they knew God, they claimed to be wise, but they were fools, they knew the truth, but what did they do? Romans 1:25 –

They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. (Romans 1:25)

The Romans were guilty of two great errors; one was in their minds, they exchanged the truth of God for a lie; the other in their actions, they worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator. The Romans needed a reality check on their minds and actions in relation to the truth about God. Maybe we do too.

The Roman church had taken all they knew about God creating, God's love, and what Jesus did on the cross, and they decided they don't want what God wants, they want what they want. They decide to serve each other and focus on each other instead of looking to God. They worship themselves instead of the one who created them. I don't know anyone who would say they "worship" someone else, but the word here is not talking about singing to

someone, or bowing before them, or kissing their ring or other types of actions we might consider “worship”.

The definition of the word “Worship” Paul uses is: stand in awe of, or to revere. We stand in awe of others all the time. Sometimes it’s on TV or online with celebrities, athletes, politicians. Sometimes it’s in person with people we know: people who have more money than us, a better job, a bigger house, a better marriage, or family. Sometimes we even stand in awe of ourselves. I’m not talking about appreciating yourself, loving yourself, or appreciating others and loving others. Jesus said we are to love our neighbor as ourself. But when we view ourselves or others as being less than a child of God, we exchange the truth about God for a lie. The Romans were guilty in their minds and actions. If we are guilty in how we think about others or other things, it becomes easier for us to also be guilty in our actions.

Paul then lists all types of sins that he has heard about happening in the church, because they are choosing themselves and their desires over God. Paul calls them out on their sexual impurity, as well as a whole list of other sins starting in Romans 1:29 -

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. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them. (Romans 1:29-32)

You might be thinking, “well at least I’m not THAT bad.” You might be right, but if you are putting your desires ahead of what you know God wants, you’re in the same boat. Paul is confronting the church in Rome, and I bet he would have similar words for the churches in America too. The Roman church was living no different than those outside the church. They had a learned about God’s love, but they didn’t treat others with God’s love. They may have claimed to love God, but you wouldn’t have guessed it based on how they treated others. God’s wrath is for the Romans’ sin, and our sin too. Fun sermon on God’s wrath, isn’t it? Want to kill the conversation at lunch today? “Want to talk about God’s wrath?” That would do it. We don’t know much about God’s wrath outside of what we have seen in the Bible.

In the early parts of the Old Testament, the wrath of God is especially connected with the Israelites. The people of Israel were in a special relationship with God, he had chosen them, and offered them the special relationship which would be obtained as long as they kept his law, this means a breach of the law provoked the wrath of God, and any other nation, which treated Israel with cruelty or injustice, also incurred the wrath of God, like the Babylonians and the Egyptians. We learn early on as children about God’s wrath in the story of Noah. Funny how Noah is a kid’s Bible story because of the animals, but also, the whole world drowns to death.

Here is an important thing to remember about God’s wrath though: it is the wrath of God. Everything that we know about God—that He is just, that He is love, and that He is good—needs to be poured into our understanding of His wrath. The words ‘anger’ and ‘wrath’ make us think about our own experience of these things. You may have suffered

because of someone who has anger problems. Human anger can often be unpredictable, petty, and irrational. I know I have lost my temper before. But these things are not true of the anger of God. God's wrath is the just and measured response of His holiness towards evil.

He's not following us around with lightning bolts, and He's not a rage monster sitting up in heaven just waiting for us to mess up. He disciplines us but not in anger. He corrects us because He knows that sin leads to suffering. God doesn't want to see us suffer, He loves us and wants to see us saved from our sin, which is why Jesus came. If we are going to understand salvation, and why Jesus came to save us, we need to know what He saves us from. Paul's letter to the Romans is all about the gospel—the good news of Jesus—we must realize that in order to talk about the good news in the right way, we must also deal with the bad news. So after listing off sins the Romans are living in and approving of others, chapter 2 continues:

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? (Romans 2:1-3)

In chapter 2, Paul is addressing the Jews in Rome. He just painted a grim and terrible picture of the human world, that would expect the wrath of God. The Jews in Rome would have agreed thoroughly that God's wrath would come, just not on them. Many Jews thought they occupied a privileged position because they were Jewish. Jews were from the tribe of Judah, and related to Jesus, King David, and Abraham. There were two groups, Jew, and everyone else – Gentile. God wouldn't bring wrath on His chosen people, right? That is what the Jews may have thought. Well, Paul was a Jew, and here Paul is pointing out to the Jews that he is just as much a sinner as the Gentiles. Roman 2:6 –

God "will repay each person according to what they have done." (Romans 2:6)

God's wrath is not going to be just for one group of people, because God's love is not just for one group of people. Jesus died for everyone, so that anyone can be saved, which means anyone can be freed from the wrath of God. Judgment was coming for everyone, and not because of your tribe, race, country, or who you were related to, but by the kind of life you live. Paul was a Jew sent to share the message of Jesus with non-Jews. Yes, judgment and wrath are for everyone, but you know who else is for everyone? Jesus! The one who saves us from the wrath we have been talking about. Paul reiterates in verse 11 –

For God does not show favoritism. (Romans 2:11)

There will be trouble and distress for those who do evil, and there will be peace and glory for those who do good. Jews, Gentiles, everyone.

The message of Jesus was spreading all over, including to the Gentiles, but the church was dishonoring God by knowing His law, and not obeying it. The church was being very hypocritical, and by telling others what they ought to do, even though they weren't doing it.

Telling others to not steal, and they would steal; telling others not to commit adultery, and they would commit adultery. Paul told them in verse 23.

You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." (Romans 2:23-24)

A Jew not honoring God would totally put off a Gentile or anyone interested in learning more about God. When we don't honor God, we put others off too. It's hard to tell others about God's love if we aren't loving. It's incredibly sad, that the message of Jesus gets damaged by people who follow Jesus. When someone decides they want nothing to do with church, it's usually because of someone they know who goes to church. I think Paul is saying to stop being a bad example to others on how to follow Jesus. You know what God wants, but dishonoring God by not obeying Him. It's not enough to just know something. James 4:17 Remember:

It is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it. (Romans 4:17)

It is important to know, but what you know should direct what you do, or don't do. The information leads us to transformation. If you know a lot of information from the Bible about how God sees you and others, then that info needs to transform how you see yourself and others. And transform how you treat yourself, and others, because you put to practice what you know.

Paul calls the Jews out for knowing what God wants and not living that way. They were the ones who God gave the law to, when Moses went up on the mountain to get the Ten Commandments. They were a people set apart and supposed to be examples of God's love in action. Paul even addresses one of the ways they showed they were set apart: circumcision. Wait a minute...Wrath of God and circumcision in the same sermon, come on. What else can I say to make you more uncomfortable, politics? Nah. More ways to sabotage the lunch conversation, right?

Circumcision was a sign of God's promise with Abraham and his descendants. A decision Abraham made as an adult. A painful decision, without modern medicine, and permanent mark to show Abraham, the men in his family, and Jews were committed to following God. It was a way to prove they had faith, to prove they had skin in the game lol. Too far? You're listening now though, right? But Paul's saying when it comes to following Jesus, it's not about the family or race you were born into, and it's not about what mark you have on your body, it's about how you live.

God's love is for everyone, God's wrath for those who choose evil is for everyone. But he's not saying our family, or race, or culture doesn't matter at all.

What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God. What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! (Romans 3:1-4)

He's not saying Jews are in a position of privilege but a position of responsibility. We are all in a position of responsibility, to introduce people to Jesus. The "words of God" here is referring to the Commandments given to Moses. God entrusted them with commandments,

not privileges. He is saying, “you are a special people, so live a special way”, not “you are a special people, so do what you want.”

God has entrusted us with a lot too. Money, this building, our children, strengths and abilities, relationships. Whatever God has given you, we need to be faithful with what we do with it. But what if some are unfaithful? What if followers of Christ are unfaithful in how they live and follow Jesus? Unfortunately, they are, we are. When we are unfaithful, it does not change God’s faithfulness. I remember one time, my mom calling me and asking for prayer. I told her I would pray for her, then we hung up, and then I forgot. A day later, she calls and says, “everything is great, thanks so much for praying” and I had to apologize and tell her I totally forgot to pray. I made a commitment, and broke it.

We can be unfaithful in prayer, unfaithful in spending time with God, unfaithful in how we represent Jesus to others. It happens all the time. Ever had your feelings hurt by someone who claimed to follow Jesus? Ever had to go apologize to someone because you were the one doing the hurting? You were the one misrepresenting Jesus? I have. If you have, you need to remember that God is faithful even when we are unfaithful. Which means that if someone has hurt you, then you need to remember that God is faithful, even when others are not. When we mess up, God loves us anyway. God wants to help us so we can be faithful to Him and be a living example of Jesus in our community. Let’s pray and ask God to help us be it.

Prayer

Closing: One of my prayers in Kids Church ends like this, “thank you God, for loving us, no matter what.” I need that reminder. No matter what you do, Jew or Gentile, faithful or unfaithful, God is faithful to save you, and is always going to love you. Let’s be faithful to God in how we treat ourselves, and in how we treat others as we go, God bless you.