

Why Is God Angry?

Romans 1:18-20

April 10, 2011

Review Overview of Romans (Slide)

Recap from last time:

- In the gospel, God reveals (brings and shows) his righteousness
 - Which is the salvation of his people (in the OT specifically, the righteousness of God is described as bringing the salvation of his people)
- Also a righteousness that is deposited in the people of God, that we are made righteous in Jesus
 - Just as in Adam we are all made sinners
 - In Christ we are made righteous with the righteousness of God
- These two together make it clear that the salvation of God is not just a situation but is also a transformation: that being saved from our sins is also being removed from the dominion and control of sin. Amen!
- Yet, the righteousness of God (the salvation of his people and their transformation) in the gospel is given to God's people solely by the agency of faith, from first to last:
 - "The righteous will live by faith" meaning that the righteous are righteous by faith or in faith in Christ (this is not intended to contrast "faith living" with living by "sight", but is instead intended to contrast righteousness by faith with a righteousness by law, which is unattainable. We'll see this more in 3:20...

Scripture (Romans 1:18-20) and Prayer

Introduction

- Man on Fire
 - Plot Summary
 - Denzel Washington as former Recon Marine John Creasy who has been hired to protect the 9 year old little girl of an executive from kidnapping, the little girl played by Dakota Fanning is affectionately known as Pita

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- John Creasy and Pita develop a close and appropriately affectionate relationship, and becomes clear that protecting Pita becomes not just a job for Creasy but it is personal; his heart is into it
- Despite his best efforts, Denzel's character is unable to prevent the girl from being kidnapped and while her family tries to decide if they should pay the kidnappers a ransom, Washington's character, Creasy launches a campaign of violent revenge that seeks to do two things
 - Primarily rescue the girl from her captors
 - Exact justice against those who did as he spares neither life nor limb as he goes about his business: his revenge is so hot and so intense he can only be called a "Man of Fire"
- What's interesting about watching this film, is that hardly any of us would find anything wrong or lacking in what John Creasy does in killing the criminals in his cause to rescue this innocent girl.
 - We know he's a flawed character, but his cause is good
 - In fact, we see his cause as being redemptive because by pouring his life into rescuing this girl, he is actually showing his capacity to love and the degree of his love for her: he will spare no life to rescue hers. The value of her life is supreme, especially in relation to those evil criminals who kidnapped her.
- I find it amazing that in our culture that we can vindicate such a character as John Creasy in Man on Fire, and even ascribe him as heroic, yet "God on Fire" is offensive to many people, his cause at going after the wicked and rebellious, is considered unthinkable by so many today.
 - In D.A. Carson's excellent little book entitled "The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God," he describes why a sentimental and unbiblical view of God's love has made some standard doctrines of the Bible difficult to understand by many people, even in our churches. These include
 - The holiness of God
 - The sovereignty of God

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- The wrath of God
- The latter is particularly tough because it has to do with God's judgment, ultimately by sending sinners to hell
 - Of course, many in the church seek to defang this teaching by saying that God **sends** no one to hell, but people send themselves to hell by choosing not to be saved.
 - Well, they forget Jesus' words in Luke 12:5 - *But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has **power to throw you into hell**. Yes, I tell you, **fear him**.*
 - We can debate the theology of whether people choose to go to hell, but at the bottom people don't jump into hell, they are placed there by the power of God: it is the sovereign power of God that ensures all those not in Christ will land in eternal torment.
- But, what of love? Well, let's work our way toward that, so let's do three things
 - **First**, let's examine briefly this text, because there is wrath here, we can't deny that, and it gives us the reason for God's wrath is being revealed from heaven. And then, I want to simply illustrate how love and wrath are held together in God's righteousness, even God's goodness!
 - **Secondly**, we want to look more closely at God's wrath in scripture
 - **Lastly**, how does what we see about God's character in this affect my living? What does it mean to live before a loving, holy, and wrathful God?

This could be a very difficult and hard thing to understand, but we're going to labor to keep it very simple, prayerfully without compromising it.

I. Summary of the Text (v.18-20)

- After proclaiming the revelation of the righteousness of God in the gospel by faith, Paul begins to make his lengthy case that we are only justified by faith by first making it clear that people are pretty spiritually messed up, and he begins his case by stating bluntly that

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humanity's problem is not that we can't all seem to get along or that we simply keep messing things up: the problem for fallen, sinful humanity is God!

- Just as Hitler's problem was the Allied forces that were armed and committed to repeal his evil attempt to take all of Europe...
- And Prime Minister Tojo of Japan's problem was the large American nation he provoked by attacking Pearl Harbor and unleashing America's military fury in the Pacific...
- Sinful man has provoked a holy God for... Paul tell us the wrath of God is being revealed (coming upon) against all the godlessness and wickedness of men...
- This is a fact, and we'll look at it in more detail in a moment... but let's quickly call out a few things from the text that we need to appreciate it about sinfulness
- Sin suppresses the truth (v.18)
 - Sin retards spiritual thinking
 - Sinning, especially when it is regular, keeps me from thinking spiritually right
 - When in sin
 - I don't see the truth of who I am
 - I don't see the truth of what I am doing
 - I will then come to defend what I am doing and to further it: my sin will become my cause!
 - Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:18 that sin darkens our understanding and leads to spiritual ignorance and prevents the knowledge of God. Recall Piper's bold statement about unbridled sexual sin: those who practice it don't know God, or at least don't God as they ought!
- Yet, this ignorance is not because God has not shown himself; he has shown himself in his creation (v.19-20). Look also at **Psalm 19:1-3**
 - This is universal: God speaks of his existence through his creation, so we should see, though he is invisible, that he alone is divine and eternal
 - So, we are all accountable: we should know better, yet as we sin, we suppress the truth for ourselves and others

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- Over the time sin and wickedness becomes normal and accepted, instead of sin being shameful and secretive, it becomes recreational and acceptable
 - What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas! Is a blatant promotion of recreational sin!
 - Because of this
 - God is angry, for one [the revelation of God's wrath, Paul calls it]
 - And unless God does something about it, his wrath will remain on us [John 3:36 - *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him*]
 - Show depiction of chart relating God's gospel (love) and God's wrath through his righteousness

2. A Closer Look at God's Wrath: How Do We Understand It?

- First let's be clear that the Bible does make warnings to us about anger
 - Matthew 5:21-22,
 - Ephesians 4:31,
 - Colossians 3:8,
 - I Timothy 2:8,
- Yet, Jesus displayed anger when turning over the moneychangers tables in John 2:17...so apparently anger is appropriate when directed at God's enemies, e.g. Jeremiah in 6:11, *I am full of the wrath of the Lord, and I cannot hold it in!*
- The OT passages depicting God's wrath are too many to number, but consider these from Isaiah
 - 13:9, *See, the day of the LORD is coming—a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it.*
 - 63:1-6, *I Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength?
“It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.” 2 Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? 3 “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the*

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*nations no one was with me. I trampled them in **my anger** and trod them down in my **wrath**; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. 4 For the day of **vengeance was in my heart**, and the year of my redemption has come. 5 I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so my own arm worked salvation for me, and my own **wrath** sustained me. 6 I trampled the nations in my **anger**; in my **wrath** I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground.”*

- Let's also consider this example of God's anger directed specifically at Israel in Numbers 11
 - 11:1, *Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD, and when he heard them his **anger** was aroused.*
 - 11:10, *the Lord became **exceedingly angry**, and Moses was troubled*
 - 11:18-20, *“Tell the people: ‘Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. The LORD heard you when you wailed, “If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!” Now the LORD will give you meat, and you will eat it. You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it*
 - 11:33, *33 But while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the **anger of the LORD** burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague.*
- We also see God's wrath laid out in the NT
 - Ephesians 2:3b,
 - Ephesians 5:6,
 - Colossians 3:6,
 - Revelation 14:10, 19
 - Revelation 19:1-3, 11-18,
- The question remains: where does this righteous anger come from? Ultimately it comes from God's passion for his glory, which is very well expressed in his jealousy:
 - Think of these two commands in Dt 5:8-11,
 - See also
 - Dt 4:24,

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- Dt 6:13-15
 - What's interesting about these is that are all given by God to those he loves. This is the standard for God's people, so what does that mean for those who are outside the assembly of the elect? Peter asks this question in I Peter 4:17-18,
- So, what we see here is a weighty commitment from the Lord for his name and his glory, but that's not the only motivation for his wrathful justice, it is also includes his goodness and his justice
 - God cannot love good without hating evil
 - So, even his love is bound to his justice and his goodness
 - In redemption he shows his love justly (Romans 3:26)
 - It would be wrong for God to excuse rebellion against him, since his creatures' rejection of him is a violation of God's covenant with his creation, moreover if there was no consequence of rebellion against God, his good creation would be at risk
 - God tossed Satan and his angels from heaven and promises to lock them away
 - We only need to see the fall as evidence as to what happens when sin corrupts what God has made! Yet he promises to reverse this, which includes his just condemnation of the wicked.
- So, the Lord is zealous and jealous for his name and his glory, he preserves his justice but those aren't the only motivation for his wrathful justice, it is also vengeance for mistreatment against his covenant people, God's love for you!
- Three passages come immediately to mind
 - 2 Thessalonians 1:6-7,
 - Revelation 6:9-11,
 - Romans 9:22-23,
- Let me briefly say, that God's anger is not quick or short-fused
 - Isaiah 48:9
 - And of course, we cannot forget these

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- Ezekiel 33:11, *'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked,*
 - 1 Timothy 2:3-4, ³ *This is good, and pleases God our Savior,* ⁴ *who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*
 - 2 Peter 3:9, ⁹ *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*
- So God does not react with a short-fused anger, he is long-suffering, but his judgment happens suddenly, one moment is not there and the next it is on and pressing

3. How Does This Affect My Living?

- Hebrews 10:26-31
 - Fear God, saints, it is the beginning of wisdom...don't presume upon mercy while living selfishly and sinfully, there is no basis for spiritual confidence while regularly and habitually living sinfully
 - Don't let people suggest to you that the only cost your sinful living will have against you is a weak spiritual life, Paul says very firmly to the Ephesians: do not let anyone deceive you with empty words, because of such practices God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.
 - All of these statements are pointing to those who claim association with God's people!
- Hebrews 12:28-29
 - Let us not play with God, but worship him with reverence and fear
 - Not shunning his standards of holiness
 - Not introducing disunity among his people
 - Not impeding the work of Christ among those who are weak and don't know him

Conclusion

What is my response?

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- Some of you have enjoyed great fellowship with the Lord over the years, but it has since grown cold: You have forsaken your first love, remember the height you have fallen, repent and do the things you did at first!
- Some of you are spiritually asleep, you are in a kind of spiritual slumber, busy but spiritually out; wake up! Strengthen what remains!
- Others perhaps are lukewarm spiritually but quite hot to the world. You are accepted and comfortable there, the Lord would say to you repent! Your deeds and your supposed wealth are of no value before the Lord, instead pursue Christ, open the doors of your heart to him, and allow him in to remake and reform you.
- Lastly, some know not Christ at all. You've never committed to him, your life of sin and rebellion, at first it was God and parents, but now it just continues in rebellion against God alone. Listen!
 - You are in a state of hostility with God, yet you can have peace with God through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1)
 - You say, what about my sins, I am guilty in them. True, but Jesus Christ is the Righteous One, he is the atoning sacrifice or the propitiation for our sins, and not only ours but also for the sins of the whole world! (1 John 2:1-2) So, surely his death is adequate for your sins, his blood is ample to purchase you for God, even today!
 - You then say, I have no power over my sins, my appetites will get the best of me! Fear not, in Christ you die with him, so your old self is crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with...and now you can live to God! Trust Jesus for this and he will deliver you.
- Cry out to God, save me Lord I am a sinner and I am helpless!! Come now!!