

VIII. Romans in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel of God
“Three Divine Judgments and the Death Spiral
in a Cultural Celebration of Idolatry—Part II”
Romans 1:18–32
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
April 18, 2021 • Sunday Morning Sermon

We will pick up where we left off in our study of the book of Romans. This is God’s Word, inspired, infallible and inerrant. Romans 1:15–17 says [15] *So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. [16] For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I would think many of you have been caught in this situation where you have been given some news to give to somebody but the news is mixed with good news and bad news so you now have to decide how you will tell them. Typically, people tend to say to the person ‘I have some good news and some bad news, so which do you want first?’ They want to be taken off the hook in deciding which news to give first.

Paul has some good news and bad news but he doesn’t ask us what we want to hear first for he made the decision inspired by the Holy Spirit as to what we would hear first and then following. Good news is where we get the word Gospel – the good message of God. Paul is eager to come preach the good news of the Gospel of how God has made a way to save sinners and His way is the Way, the Truth and the Life. John 14:6 says, [6] *Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. God has provided this that all who come to Him will surely be saved and can know they have eternal life. Paul is eager to preach this Gospel because he is not ashamed.*

Why does Paul start Romans 1:15 with the word so? Paul wrote a very common first century letter as we saw in Romans 1:1–14 and one of the things we will see often in this book is that Paul wants to come to Rome, not to enact political, economic or social reform but to eagerly preach the Gospel. He has already been to the power centers of Jerusalem, Ephesus and Corinth but now he wants to go to the power center of Rome. Rome will try to shame Paul into silence, for all unbelieving cultures do, but Paul will speak the truth of God’s Word in charity and clarity. He wants to proclaim the Gospel of God, not the gospel of the presbyterian church of America or your gospel or my gospel. We don’t own the Gospel but it can become your Gospel if the Gospel owns you.

Does this Gospel own you? This is the Gospel of God and it shows Ownership because it’s from God, by the grace of God, through the Son of God and because of God. It is a Trinitarian Gospel because the Father has authored our salvation, the Son has accomplished our salvation and the Holy Spirit applies our salvation and it’s there to the glory of God for that is the Gospel of God which reveals the grace of God.

Paul repeatedly asks God about going to Rome and God repeatedly says ‘no’ but what God is actually saying is ‘not now’ because Paul eventually will get there in a few years as he gets an all-expense paid prison ministry started there. But because he can’t get there right now

Paul decides to send a letter expounding the Gospel of God. I hope and pray if you know God you are not ignoring the Gospel of God out of ignorance but that you want to hear about it. Paul starts off with this brief sketch of the Gospel with five distinctives. The brief sketch is in Romans 1:16–17 which says [16] *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”*

The first distinctive is that the Gospel is definitive – it is *the* Gospel of God. In other words, God has defined the Gospel and revealed it to us in His Word. We don’t add to it or subtract from it. We embrace the Gospel of God that has a declaring blessing where He declares us right with God through the intercessory work of Christ who paid for our sins and gives us His righteousness and we embrace the transforming grace of the power of God for if you could get better on your own you wouldn’t need the Gospel. You can’t get better and that’s why the Gospel is here due to Jesus going into the world to save the unsavable for the only way they can be saved is by Him. This Gospel reveals that God did this, not because He needed you but because He wanted you of the love of God because of the grace of God.

The second distinctive is that the Gospel of God has the power of God. We are dead sinners so how does a dead sinner get to life? You have to get the power of God.

The third distinctive is that we have the righteousness of God. This is important because when Jesus pays for my sins the doors of hell are shut, but the doors of heaven are only for the righteous and my righteousness is like filthy rags but praise God in Jesus I get His righteousness. II Corinthians 5:21 says [21] *For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.* His blood shed for me as He drank the cup of the wrath of God pays for my judgment for all eternity and saves me from my sins as that closes the gates of hell. Jesus canceled my ticket to hell when He paid for it on the cross and secured my ticket to heaven through His righteousness – I am accepted in the Beloved One.

The fourth distinctive is that this Gospel is inclusive. Jesus saves sinners and that is everyone no matter what their background or ethnicity or status. Romans 10:13 says [13] *For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* I was trained in Evangelism Explosion (EE) to share the Gospel but I love to practice EEEEE which stands for ‘everyone evangelizing everybody everywhere every day.’ Go everywhere and share the Gospel with people.

The fifth distinctive is it only saves those who believe. Romans 1:17 says [17] *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”* (Also, Galatians 3:11) So He a sure Hope and He is the only Hope. He is the Blessed Hope.

Paul has just opened up this glorious picture of the Gospel of God revealed in the grace of God, my expectation is that he will now really unpack this thing or maybe that’s what I would do at this point but it is not what Paul does. He then makes an abrupt, challenging, hard, bone-jarring turn from the grace of God revealed in the Gospel of God to the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of man. When he turns to the wrath of God he is yet going to explain the grace of God but he is not going to get back to the grace of God in his explanation until he finishes telling you what you need to know about the wrath of God from Romans 1:18 all the way to Romans 3:23.

Paul will show us why God’s wrath is revealed, the three judgments of God’s present wrath, then in Romans 2 he will show how the pagan is guilty. The last part of Romans 2 will

show how the religious pagan is guilty and then in Romans 3 he shows how the Jew is guilty. In other words, he tells you why He saves Jew and Gentile because the summation is in Romans 3:23 which says [23] *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. We have no hope in our ethnicity and our only hope is in Jesus. We are all sinners under the judgment of God. When he finishes that he will be back to the grace of God on steroids in Romans 4 through Romans 11 and then he will explain the life of grace beginning in Romans 12.

So let's get into our text for this study to see what Paul wants us to see about the wrath of God. Romans 1:18–23 says [18] *For **the wrath of God is revealed** from heaven against all ungodliness (living life without reference to God as if we are God) and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] 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. [21] For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

Spoiler alert – not only does Paul make this abrupt turn to deal with the wrath of God from heaven, but he will take us into subjects that if it was left up to me, I would not speak about let alone preach about. Much of that will be in the next study but what I know is that all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable (II Timothy 3:16–17) so if it's in the Bible it's in here for a reason which is one of the reasons I do expositional preaching. This means I don't pick and choose, I preach what is in the Bible and that's why it's so crucial. Paul will address subjects that are unbelievably relevant to us that are hard to deal with but must be dealt with and must be understood so that the Gospel of grace is understood. As we get into this I want you to watch Paul's close reasoning.

The first thing is the wrath of God is revealed. If you have any Christian theology background you know that initiated into eternity is a judgment day and on the other side of that Day those who are not in the book of Life, the eternal, unrestrained, immeasurable wrath of God for eternity is poured out upon all who have sinned against God and not sought salvation in Christ. So when we think of the wrath of God on that Day, as God hurls those into absolute isolation, Gehenna, utter darkness, with no relationships for all eternity, Paul is not talking about that wrath of God, although he does teach about that. Jesus taught more on hell, that wrath to come than anyone, but Paul is not talking about here the eternal wrath of God revealed at the Judgment Seat for Paul is speaking of the wrath of God that is now.

Unrighteousness as Paul speaks of in Romans 1:18 is always attached to self-reliance, self-absorption, and self-exalting life and will be disobedience to God's Word. God's wrath is being revealed and this is not unmeasured wrath but measured wrath. It is not sending away wrath but giving over wrath. This is not eternal wrath but a temporal wrath. What specifically is the sin that brings God's wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness? Paul says it's those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Suppress is a difficult word. It is the response of something that is rising up that you are trying to push down. It is the intentionally gathering of all of your strength, abilities and all God gave you and made you, and instead of embracing the truth there is a rebellion against the truth, a suppression of the truth. Is everyone guilty of that? Yes. What truth are they rebelling against? It is the revealed truth of God that is available to everyone and that's the truth of who God is revealed in the creation.

Romans 1:19 says [19] *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.* No one has an information deficit. God has revealed Himself to all of us in creation. What has God shown to them? Romans 1:20 says [20] *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 (who suppress the truth) are without excuse.* The beauty of the Creator is displayed in the creation. The creation is His sounding board, His microphone, His footprint, His handiwork, His fingerprint. What do we do with that information with our sin nature? We suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

Romans 1:21–23 says [21] *For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.* You are born with the testimony of God shouting from creation and you're born internally knowing the reality of God. You are not born atheists for you don't meet five-year-old atheists. Children will have to learn to be an atheist. We are born with a sin-nature so that is why one would like to be an atheist. We are born, made in the image of God surrounded by the testimony of God. It's not a childish faith but a child-like faith. I like to tell parents who want their babies baptized that they are covenant vipers in diapers because they have a sin-nature which makes things all about them and not God.

This is the reason I love to teach Catechism to children. The first question is, what is the chief end of man? Answer; Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever. Internally children are trying to write another catechism, which is what is the chief end of God? Me. So I'll invent the god that accomplishes what I really want to believe. What do we do with the information from God? We suppress it. There is the glorious testimony of who God is all around us. I cut the top of my finger off a couple of months ago and 27 things had to happen in a couple of seconds for me not to die which has been there since creation so I have a hard time believing in evolution for while things were evolving, they would have died if things had not been already set in place. I see the majesty of God all around me – the majesty of the trees, the hydrological cycle, the glory of God as He sits upon the circle of the earth (Job quote). I know that God has revealed who He is in this glorious creation, but we will do everything to suppress it.

What happens when you suppress the truth because of the wrath of God? You don't quit thinking. You become futile in your thinking (Romans 1:21–23). I like what one Baptist preacher said on this; 'You don't quit thinking, you just start doing stinkin' thinkin'.' You then embrace absurdity. You will then profess to be wise and become fools. Then you embark on a sophisticated journey into imbecility and absurdity. It's not that you will quit thinking but you will think anything and everything in order not to think what God has revealed. The reason you do this is not a mind problem but a heart problem for the heart is darkened.

There is something else we do when we suppress the truth. We don't become irreligious or a non-worshiper for you will always believe and worship, but instead of worshipping the One true and living God, you will not honor Him or give Him thanks, you become an idolator and embrace the absurdity of manmade religions. For when we come to worship Him we give thanks and praise to our Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer who gives us the breath of life and is our life. Hear what the Prophet Isaiah says of the folly of idolatry from Isaiah 44.

Isaiah 44:12–20 says [12] *The ironsmith takes a cutting tool and works it over the coals. He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm. He becomes hungry, and his*

strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. [13] The carpenter stretches a line; he marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house. [14] He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. [15] Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. [16] Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!" [17] And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!"

[18] They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. [19] No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, "Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?" [20] He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" How absurd is that!

It doesn't matter what system of a tribe that has been found for they all have a system of a week, holy days, marriages and families but because of a sin nature the marriages, families, weeks, and the religion of the holy days are perverted. You may be thinking you're glad you're not in one of those primitive tribes, really? Take a look at our paganism. We don't honor God who is distinct from His creation for we attack every distinction He puts in His creation. We call light, darkness and darkness, light. Killing the pre-born, unwanted and imperfect is called good. Evil is called good and good is called evil. Look at what we've done to marriages, families, the sanity of God in gender in our sophisticated journey into insanity, imbecility and absurdity. The answer is not in a sociological tool to cutback the absurdity for the answer is in the Gospel of God that goes to the root and that's the heart. The answer isn't nibbling around the edges or in the next election or in some economic reform.

The answer to this issue is found in the Gospel of God laying hold of sinners and rescuing them from their sin and the wrath of God through Jesus who takes away their sin and who endured the wrath of God for their sin. Jesus is the only One who gives us a new record and a new heart. There God goes to the root and that's why Paul wants us to see the wrath of God as he lifts up before you the grace of God in the Gospel of God.

Here is the takeaway. There is no lack of information for the priority of Divine adoration. In other words, God made you for His glory and there is no lack of information on that. My son calls me periodically and say 'Dad there is a movie we need to see in IMAX.' I'm well aware it will cost me more because my son suggested it but I ask him what IMAX is. He says it just surrounds you like a cyclorama. When we suppress the truth in unrighteousness there is no lack of information for you are surrounded in the Divine cyclorama IMAX. Not only that, you have a surround system of sound that is unbelievable for the heavens are shouting the glory of God. Day after day and night after night their speech pours forth. We live in the cyclorama theater of God's glory and majesty but watch our insanity as we would deny the Creator in His glory.

One might be thinking, 'oh no for once there was nothing and somehow nothing produced something and then the something says 'let's divide and then we'll get back together and produce some more somethings.' I'm just a cosmic accident. I'm a mutated germ but thankfully I didn't end up a rock. I'm basically a burp from a gas heap.' Even when we're able

to see the intricacies of our DNA through one simple cell, is astonishing yet we will go to any length to suppress the truth of God even into insane absurdity. I want to address every student reading this and to remember that what is being taught to suppress this truth is absurd, insane and a flight into imbecility. You don't act with arrogance but with grace because that is what you and I believed until God's grace rescued us. When His grace rescued us, we now see the truth as who God is as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Most schools have no sane answer for who you are, how you got here and what is wrong.

Everyone knows there is something wrong but they have no sane answer for what's wrong. Right now it's that the government is not powerful enough to own everything and distribute it. There have been other answers as well. You know that you are made in the image of God. You know the problem – it is sin. You know the solution – it's a God who loves and saved sinners who takes them just as they are and never leaves them just as they are and change them. He not only has declarative blessings but the Gospel has transformative blessings to change us from faith to faith as we grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Join the company of the Gospel of the eager and unashamed because it makes sense.

Man will say 'no' to the worship of God through the sinful delusion of self-exaltation. Perhaps you think like Carl Sagan. When asked how he got here he says there is the cosmos and this is what he says about cosmos, 'That's all there is, that's all there was and that's all there ever will be.' I say there was actually a time that the cosmos wasn't but I can take you to Revelation 4 and introduce you to the God who was, who is and who is to come. When He spoke came space, time and matter.

Genesis 1:1 says *[1] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.* That makes sense. The design makes sense. The order makes sense. The diversity and the glory make sense. It even makes sense that we are made in His image, that I have the ability to appreciate it and give Him glory for it, instead of the unholy trinity of space, time and matter which says if you give matter enough space and time you get this.

The problem is not the lack of our mind. The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart and God's solution is the glorious Gospel of God. So here are some thoughts to walk away with. God's wrath now is a gracious warning of God's wrath to come. The wrath that is now revealed is warning us of the wrath to be revealed and therefore in this day flee to Him who will save you. This day make Jesus your Lord and Savior and then know that He is your life and He will bring you to be with Him in that Day, written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Secondly, God's wrath now gives us over, God's grace is a takeover. I like to watch Chip and Joanna Gaines' show Fixer Upper. A man said to me that I should do a sermon on the work of the Gospel doing an extreme makeover and I would if I thought the Gospel did that but the Gospel doesn't do an extreme makeover for the makeover is the result that the Gospel does a takeover. God saves us and now Jesus is our very life. That wrath to come is so great that it says in Revelation 6:14–17 says *[14] The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. [15] Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, [16] calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, [17] for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"* In that day we'd rather have a mountain fall on us than the wrath of God.

So in this day don't be given over, but come to Christ who does the takeover and then instead of the wrath of God bringing insanity and idolatry, the grace of God will bring sanity and

worship. Instead of suppressing the truth you will hunger for the truth. Instead of a futile mind you will have a noble mind, a Berean mind – who received the Word with eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so (Acts 17:11). You will love to hear God's Word preached and get into regularly. I don't want to suppress the truth, for I want to know the truth because the truth is what sets me free.

I don't want the emptiness of idolatry and its insensibility. People might think they don't have stone gods or physical graven images but there are sports, material things, promotions, entertainment for we put our hope in that which is passing away and they become our idols, instead of being able to use what is passing away to the glory of God. [31] *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God* (I Corinthians 10:31). You don't eat or drink to live, you eat and drink to live for Jesus. Come to Christ.

If you want to put the culture of insanity, absurdity and imbecility to flight then go tell people that Jesus loves them and will set them free, will give them a new heart and a new life because the grace of God has satisfied the wrath of God in Jesus to save sinners by the grace of God to the glory of God now and for eternity. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments and the privilege we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for taking us places that we would not naturally or normally go but which we need to go because you can't know the amazing grace of God without knowing the emptiness of our sins and the end of our sins which is the wrath of God. Father, may everyone reading this today escape the wrath of the Lamb because this day they come to Christ, the blood of the Lamb. Behold the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world. Jesus, for those who understand that the wrath of God is being revealed and that's what they were rescued from and instead of being given over You did a takeover in their life, send them to tell others that Jesus loves sinners and He doesn't do cosmetic surgery – He does heart transplants so that instead of suppressing truth you hunger for it, instead of the emptiness of idolatry you know the joy of doing the one thing that God seeks – true worshippers who worship Him in spirit and in truth. This is done not at the convenience of my schedule but at the priority of my entire life, for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

Understanding the Gospel of God

The Grace of God <> The Wrath of God

Life Takeaway

There is no lack of information for the priority of Divine Adoration, but there is a sinful delusion of self-exaltation.

The Heart of our Problem is the Problem with our Heart.

God's wrath now is a gracious warning of God's wrath to come.

God's Wrath now gives us over; God's Grace now takes us over.

God's Wrath now brings insanity and idolatry God's Grace now brings sanity and worship.