

Truth Imprisoned

The Banquet Table of Consequences – Part II

Romans 1:18b

Review – God’s Wrath

We have arrived at a terrifying passage of scripture which reveals an attribute of the almighty God, in whom we believe and to whom we sing, pray, and serve. It is the attribute of God’s fury or wrath. It is a side of God that is largely ignored or unwanted, not only by the world at large, but by the church.

The Times of London, reported, some time ago, that fourteen church study groups had been formed in the area of Woodford, England. Their purpose was to study the Old Testament book of Psalms, as it related to the hymns of the church. After their extensive study, they concluded that eighty-four biblical Psalms were, “not fit for Christians to sing”.ⁱ

Why were these Psalms “not fit for Christians to sing”? The groups determined this because they believed that the wrath that was reflected in those Psalms was not consistent or compatible with the gospel of love and grace.

They evidently, did not like the sound of Psalm, chapter 7, verse 11, which says, in the King James Version,

. . . God is angry with the wicked every day.

Or, Psalm, chapter 2, verses 10 through 12, which says,

Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the Lord with reverence and rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. . . .

Or Psalm, chapter 7, verses 6 and 11, which say,
Arise, O Lord, in Your anger; lift up Yourself against the rage of my adversaries, and arouse Yourself for me; You have appointed judgment. . . . God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day.

Frankly, I am surprised these study groups found only eighty-four Psalms unfit to sing due to the fact that they sang of the justice and holy judgment of God.

An unpopular attribute – The wrath of God

God’s wrath has been and always will be, throughout human history, an unpopular attribute.

Unwanted by the nature of man

The truth is, sinful men oppose this truth of God’s holiness, justice, wrath, and judgment because they do not want to be held accountable for their sin. Thus, they deny the existence of a righteous God, for a righteous God would naturally be displeased with their unrighteousness.

So, man is busy recreating God into his own image. He crafts a comfortable deity who is easier to face – or ignore. He fashions a facilitating god who pats him on the head every once in a while, and says, “Boys will be boys!”

It is no wonder that the organized church is wandering all over the theological and moral countryside. They are struggling to vote against homosexual priests and struggling to determine a

position on abortion, divorce, fornication, gambling, and on and on.

Why? Because when God's holy, absolute standard of righteousness is thrown out, everything else can come in. If you no longer have a standard of what is absolutely right, my friends, you will no longer know what is absolutely wrong!

The attribute of God's righteous wrath is an unwanted attribute by the nature of man because man wants to behave in any way he wants to behave. In other words, he does not want anybody, much less God, telling him he is wrong in any way, period!

Unwanted by the religion of man

Furthermore, the wrath and fury of God are unwanted by the religion of man because man wants to believe anything he wants to believe.

In our day of relative truth, whatever you believe has to be right, because you believe it. In fact, what a person believes about spiritual things does not even require reasoning or justification, all that matters is that you believe it. Your sincerity counts, not your reasons.

So, while religion and spirituality are bigger and more popular, but yet, more confusing and diverse than ever, it is, according to one secular source, a religion to be praised.

Because it is religious expression that downplays doctrine and dogma, and revels in direct experience of the divine – whether it's called the holy spirit or cosmic consciousness, or the true self. It is practical and personal, more about stress reduction than salvation, more therapeutic than theological. It's about feeling good, not being good. Most people still say they believe in God, but they are mixing and matching religious beliefs and practices that resonate with their own life experience.ⁱⁱ

This author thought that was an improvement.

Another author raises the warning, however, in his book, [The New Absolutes](#),

We have reached the point where we permit almost everything and stand for almost nothing, except the dogmatic belief that every person is right in their own eyes . . . our beliefs are more a matter of feelings than anything. Most important, our beliefs are our beliefs, and that, we think, makes them worthy and beyond dispute.ⁱⁱⁱ

So, what are we left with? The behavior and beliefs in a person's life are his sacred idols. Man is more guilty of idolatry than ever before. And, he would rather worship his self-made, self-styled, self-satisfying, self-vindicating, self-promoting, self-serving god than the one true and living God with whom he must give an account one day.

An undeniable attribute – The wrath of God

However, while the wrath of God is an unwanted attribute, it is an undeniable attribute.

Isaiah clearly states, in chapter 13, verses 9 through 13,

Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it.

For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light.

Thus I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless.

I will make mortal man scarcer than pure gold and mankind than the gold of Ophir.

Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken from its place at the fury of the Lord of hosts in the day of His burning anger.

Now, Isaiah was communicating the truth of God's coming wrath. The apostle Paul talks about God's wrath as if it has already come.

If you will notice, in Romans, chapter 1, verse 18a, Paul announces,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven . . .

The tense could be translated to read, "For the wrath of God is continually revealed from heaven."

What does he mean?

Two kinds of revelation about God

There are two categorical types of revelation from God.

General revelation

1. The first is, what we call, general revelation. General revelation is the kind of revelation that every human being has access to – thus, it is general.

There are two kinds of general revelation.

Creation

- The first is the natural world or creation.

General revelation affects an awareness of God's existence.

We will discuss this in greater detail in a later study, but for now, notice how Paul expounds on this form of general revelation in Romans, chapter 1, verses 19 and 20,

. . . that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

(How?)

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

In other words, creation naturally leads mankind to an awareness of a Creator; the beautiful and complex design of our universe implies a Designer.

Listen to David, as he sings about the creation pointing open hearts toward the truth of God's existence, in Psalm, chapter 19, verses 1 through 4a,

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world. . . .

In other words, no matter how remote that tribe of Indians may be; no matter where you may travel, whether it be around the world or into outer space, there is the loud persistent declaration of creation. And, creation points to a Creator.

In the town hall of Copenhagen, I have read, stands the world's most complicated clock. It took forty years to build and cost more than a million dollars. It has ten faces, fifteen thousand parts, and is accurate to two-fifths of a second every three hundred years. The clock computes the time of day, the days of the week, the months and years, and the

movements of the planets for twenty-five hundred years. Some of the parts of this clock will not move until twenty-five centuries have passed. The more you know about the clock, the more you are led to say that the designers were quite intelligent to be able to design something so sophisticated and intricate. You would never assume that it just came together over millions of years.

In the same way, even Charles Darwin once admitted that the complexity of the design within the human eye is enough to cause him to consider a Creator.

Such an incredible creation implies the existence of an incredible Creator. David said this in Psalm, chapter 19, verse 1a,

The heavens are telling of the glory of God .

..

One Puritan wrote, "God has left large footprints throughout the universe."

That argument is used by King David and the apostle Paul. They both say that God exists and everyone knows it! We will see, in this discussion, what most of the world does in spite of that knowledge.

So, the first kind of general revelation is divine creation.

Conscience

- The second kind of general revelation is human conscience.

Notice, in Romans, chapter 1, verse 19, Paul says,

because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

That which is evident *to* them is creation. That which is evident *within* them is conscience. The revelation that is available to all of humanity is creation without and conscience within.

Look at Romans, chapter 2, verses 14 through 15,

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them

When a man lies, steals, cheats, fornicates, or murders, he knows, without ever having read the

book of Exodus, that he has violated some unknown, objective standard. His heart tells him and his guilt assures him.

Where does this sense of right and wrong come from? Where does that gnawing in his stomach originate? It is, in fact, part of God's revelation that makes a man aware of morality. And, even if a man or woman has never read the Bible, they intuitively know that it is wrong to murder, to adulterate, and to lie.

God has written that Law on their hearts, and has provided a conscience that is the voice that teaches all of humanity right from wrong.

So, general revelation comes in the forms of creation and conscience.

Special Revelation

2. The other form of revelation from God is, what we call, special revelation. This form of revelation refers to explicit communication from God. You probably own a copy of it. It is called, inspired Scripture.

While general revelation allows humanity to know about God, special revelation allows humanity to worship God.

You need to know that general revelation, through creation and conscience, are not enough to save a person. It is sufficient, however, according to Romans, chapter 1, to render every person guilty and without excuse. Paul will further say, in verse 21 of that chapter, that, in spite of general revelation, men still choose to worship the rocks, the trees, the moon, and the man-made gods, while ignoring, suppressing, and silencing the voice of their conscience.

Mankind suppresses the truth of general revelation and what it reveals about a wonderful Creator. They assault the truth; they deny the truth; they resist the truth. So, men and women, whether they have a Bible or not, will be without excuse one day, because they choose not to seek after this Creator. Instead, they work hard to cover up the truth about Him and, in so living, they also violate their consciences and sin at will.

I also believe that anyone, anywhere in the world, who sees creation and believes in a Creator; who listens to conscience and desires to unburden their guilt; who does not turn to false gods, evil spirits, or nature itself, will have the necessary special revelation provided by God to allow them to hear the gospel and believe. This is a part of the mystery

between divine election on the one hand, and man as a free moral agent on the other hand.

John MacArthur writes,

No matter how little spiritual light a person may have, God guarantees that any person who sincerely seeks Him will find Him. "You will seek Me and find Me," God promises, "when you search for me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:13)^{iv}

Paul makes it even clearer that general revelation is not enough for salvation. He says that there *must be* special revelation through God's Word, for apart from biblical truth, no one can be saved! Paul writes, in Romans, chapter 10, verses 13 through 14,

. . . Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?

Skip to verse 17.

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Our passion for world missions emanates from our desire to serve as God's agents of special revelation throughout the world. We desire for those who know about God to be able to hear the gospel and thus, worship God as the only true and living, creator God.

Now, that ends our review. With that as our introduction, let us go back to the original question. The original question is, "Will we ever get out of verse 18?"

"Yes, if ye faint not . . ."

The Demonstration of God's Wrath

We have talked about the ways in which God reveals Himself. However, Paul says, in Romans, chapter 1, verse 18a, that,

For the wrath of God is [constantly] revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men . . .

The question is, "How is the wrath of God being revealed?"

Five-fold demonstration of God's wrath

Let me give the five-fold demonstration of God's wrath.

Civil punishment of sin

1. The first way God's holy anger against sin is enacted or revealed is through civil punishment of sin. In other words, His anger is demonstrated when civil courts punish offenders.

Romans, chapter 13, will inform us that civil authority is ordained by God to wield the sword against sin.

So, the punishment of crime is actually God's holy standard being carried out.

Moral evil producing misery

2. The second way in which God punishes sinners is through the built-in tendency of moral evil to produce misery.

This is a fascinating thought that we will not be able to fully explore in this discussion. Let it suffice to say that sinners do not find lasting satisfaction in their sin. Moral evil produces misery.

Conscience within each human heart

3. God also demonstrates His displeasure through the voice of conscience within each human heart.

Consequences of breaking God's Law

4. God's wrath against sinners is found as well, in the consequences of breaking God's Law.

This is seen on several fronts:

- There are consequences to breaking God's created physical laws.

If, for example, you break the law of gravity, something will break, no matter how you feel. This is like the proverbial man who decided to fly – by jumping from the roof of an office building that happened to be fifty stories high. He was heard announcing, as he passed the twentieth floor window, "So far so good."

Eventually, the law will catch up to his feelings.

William Barclay wrote,

You break the laws of agriculture and your harvest fails. You break the laws of architecture and your building collapses. You break the laws of health and your body suffers.^v

- There are consequences to violating God's moral law.

Venereal diseases proliferate, but the world does not want to accept the message this is trying to convey. I read of one actress complaining, "It is infuriating to me that something so beautiful as two consenting adults sharing a bed results in disease."

God's moral law designed one woman and one man for life. The moment you go past that limit, you run the risk of consequence.

- There are consequences to disobeying spiritual laws.

The Bible says things such as:

- . . . *do not let the sun go down on your anger* (Ephesians 4:26b)
- *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger . . . be put away from you, along with all malice.* (Ephesians 4:31)
- . . . *love your neighbor . . .* (Matthew 22:39)
- . . . *forgive . . . seventy times seven.* (Matthew 18:21-22)

These verses are not just wonderful suggestions, they are spiritual "laws" that have corresponding consequences when they are not kept.

Read the book of Proverbs and discover the physical and emotional consequences to things such as, envy, pride, bitterness, and stinginess. The truth is, suffering follows sin.

Death

5. Finally, God's wrath is revealed against sinful humanity through death.

We are told in Romans, chapter 6, verse 23,

For the wages [penalty] of sin is death . . .

And again, in Romans, chapter 5, verses 12 through 13, we are told,

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all have sinned

So, the constant, ongoing demonstration of God's wrath can be observed in everything from disease to despair to death.

The Direction of God's Wrath

Now Paul wants us to know that God's fury is not without focus. Notice, in Romans, chapter 1, verse 18, that,

... the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness

...

Against ungodliness

1. In other words, the direction of God's wrath is first directed against ungodliness.

The Greek word for "ungodliness" is "asebeia" (ἀσεβεία). This word normally refers to rebellion and dishonor, or impiety toward God.

Against unrighteousness

2. God's wrath is also revealed against unrighteousness.

The Greek word for "unrighteousness" is from "adikia" (ἀδικία), which normally refers to mankind's unjust action toward other people.

The cause is ungodliness, or the lack of respect for God. The effects are seen in the way people treat other people. In other words, the reason man cannot honor and respect man is because he does not honor and respect God.

The problem is not racism – that is the symptom. The problem is rebellion. Rebellion against God produces racism among people.

Everywhere that I have traveled in the world, I have discovered prejudice and hatred between groups of people. The Japanese and the Chinese do not like each other; the Bosnians and the Serbs hate each other; the African tribes hate each other; the Arabs and the Jews cannot get along with each other; the blacks and the whites in America have their fences too; and I have discovered that the English and the French do not like each other.

That is not the real problem, however. Their hatred for each other is a symptom of a deeper problem. It is not a matter of human relationships, it is a matter of spiritual relationships. Because there is ungodliness toward God, there is also unrighteousness toward man. Because man is not right with God, he usually is not right with other people.

The world system is constantly insisting on finding a way to get people to treat each other better. But, the world does not get very far. However, when a man or woman gets right with God, he can now get right with everyone else.

The Denial of God's Wrath

Now what, according to the apostle Paul, is the common ingredient shared by ungodly and unrighteous, sinful mankind, no matter where in the world they are? They all are involved in a systematic denial of the truth.

God has revealed Himself through general revelation; that is, creation and conscience. But mankind, Paul writes in the last part of Romans, chapter 1, verse 18,

... suppresses the truth in unrighteousness

In other words, there is, at this very moment, a universal cover up of the truth! The truth is suppressed. The Greek word for "suppressed" is from "katecho" (κατέχω), which means, "to hold fast, to hold down, to hold firmly".^{vi}

This part of verse 18 could be amplified to read, "who by their wickedness suppress the truth".^{vii}

The Jerusalem Bible translates this phrase, "who keep truth imprisoned in their wickedness".

The truth is imprisoned, held down, kept out of sight. But still, the truth of God's creation shouts the news of a Creator, and the conscience of man whispers that there is a holy standard man must follow.

Some will listen and be poised to hear further revelation from God, which leads to salvation. One such person was a girl named Helen Keller.

Helen, soon after birth, lost the ability to see, hear, or speak. I cannot even imagine the horror of that little girl, growing up in such a dark, silent world – as if sealed in a box or locked away in a closet.

However, as you may know, a dedicated teacher, named Anne Mansfield Sullivan, came into Helen's life and refused to be pushed away. Anne Sullivan slowly, painstakingly taught Helen Keller to communicate, by pressing, into the palm of her hand, the alphabet. Frankly, I find it mind-boggling that little Helen Keller would even understand what the pressing meant. However, for more than two years, Anne Sullivan was dedicated to teaching Helen Keller how to communicate. She persistently taught Helen letters and words.

Finally, after two years, the light dawned, so to speak, and Helen connected the pressing of her hand with reality. She quickly learned how to communicate back, as well as to receive more and more information. So, Anne Sullivan sent for a preacher of the gospel.

The preacher was brought in and he, through Anne's interpretation, shared the gospel of Jesus

Christ with Helen Keller. As he was sharing it with her, she broke into a smile. She quickly communicated back the startling words, “I’ve known about Him for a long time. I just didn’t know His name.”

General revelation told Helen Keller that there was a created world, even though she could not see it.

She could, however, feel it, breath it, and touch it. Her conscience also told her when her actions were sinful. She believed that general revelation and the special revelation that came in the form of the gospel message. Both introduced her to the Savior, and she believed that message and was saved. She had known about God, but now, she knew His name.

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ⁱ John MacArthur, Romans (Moody Press), p. 70.

ⁱⁱ Britannica.com/bcom/original/article/0,5744,5088,00.html

ⁱⁱⁱ William D. Watkins, The New Absolutes (Bethany House, 1996), p. 30.

^{iv} MacArthur, p. 67.

^v William Barclay, Romans (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 27.

^{vi} Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Zondervan, 1980), p. 349.

^{vii} Ralph Earle, Word Meanings in the New Testament (Baker Book House, 1989), p. 138.