

12. The Book of Romans 1:18

Paul's Epistle to the Romans
A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
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So far in our study of Romans we have finished Paul's opening salutation and his personal introduction of himself and his ministry (covering 1:1-15).

That brought us to verses 16 and 17 which set forth the theme and thesis of the epistle—

Romans 1:16–17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of The Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, *"The just shall live by faith."*

Paul now moves from verses 16 and 17 right into verse 18 which contrasts the *righteousness* of God revealed from **'faith to faith'**—with the *wrath* of God **'revealed from heaven.'**

It also contrasts two groups of people—the just who embrace the truth and live by faith with the ungodly who suppress the truth and live unrighteously.

This now begins the main body of the epistle which runs from 1:18 thru 15:13.

This first section (1:18-3:20) falls under the heading of **"Condemnation"** (judgment) because in it Paul wants to prove that the whole world, apart from Christ, is condemned by God—which is why it begins with the words, **"For the wrath of God."**—

Why is it so important that Paul begins the main body of this epistle by proving the whole world apart from Jesus is condemned?

It's important because—before people will see their need for a Savior, they must first be made to see themselves as sinners. So now we enter into, as the great pastor and teacher Donald Grey Barnhouse put it—*"The opening arguments of the prosecution in the case against unredeemed mankind."*

Romans 1:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness...

It's interesting to me that Paul begins his presentation of The Gospel (the theme of Romans) by talking about the **'wrath of God'** (the judgment of God). It's interesting because that is opposite of the way most pastors, preachers and Christians in general begin their presentation of The Gospel message.

In most of the contemporary presentations of The Gospel people try to purposely avoid any talk of God's wrath, judgment, and hell as being too negative. Instead, modern Christianity tells us that people will be won to Christ

if we focus on their *'felt needs'*—which means we should focus on the love of God for them, His desire to make them happy, how He wants them to have an *'abundant life'* full of blessings and peace and joy.

Then to *'close the deal'* we promise them that all of these things can be theirs if they simply receive Jesus—*"This is what Jesus can do for you! What do you say?"*

Of course, this turns us into *'salesmen for Jesus'* seeking to sell them The Gospel as the miracle cure for whatever ails them in life—instead of what we are really supposed to be and that is *'firemen for Jesus'* seeking to rescue people from the fires of hell!

In modern evangelism, people seldom talk about judgment and the wrath of God—unlike the old time preachers like Jonathan Edwards who said in his famous sermon *"Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"*—

"Sinners are walking on an icy plank over the pit of hell and at any time their foot can slip causing them to fall headlong into everlasting destruction."

But you see, that is way too negative—we have to keep it positive and uplifting or we'll never *'sell'* them on Jesus—we'll never close the deal! So, they tell us that we have to focus on the *love of God*—which has become the basis for most of our modern evangelism.

Not realizing that nowhere in the Book of Acts do any of the apostles use the love of God as a basis for their evangelism—rather, their gospel message was essentially—*"Flee coming judgment by coming to Jesus for salvation and safety!"*

I think that Dale Carnegie has even influenced our gospel presentation more than Jesus Christ in that—we seem to be trying very hard to *'win friends and influence people'*—instead of being faithful to the true message of The Gospel of Jesus Christ—which is offensive to many!

→ **LISTEN:** *Ray Comfort's illustration of a passenger on an airplane given a parachute so as to make their flight more 'comfortable.'*

It's interesting that from Paul's perspective fear becomes the first pressure he applies to those who are living ungodly lives—as Jude also told us to do:

Jude 22–23 (NKJV)

²² And on some have compassion, making a distinction; ²³ but others save with fear, pulling *them* out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

It is the fear of coming judgment that is really the motivation for embracing The Gospel. The Gospel is God's message of hope to encourage sinners to come to Jesus that He might rescue them from hell.

Listen, **Jesus talked about hell more than anyone else**—in fact He talked about it more than He talked about heaven or even love!

The reason is because—He didn't want anyone to go there!

Yet today almost all evangelism is based on the love of God, and we hear very little based on coming judgment. Jesus was the first *'hell fire and damnation preacher'* of the New Covenant—and yet that is not how His Church has come to present The Gospel as they evangelize the lost.

John MacArthur in his book, *“The Gospel According to Jesus”* had this to say on this subject:

“Our modern ideas of evangelism err in some key points of The Gospel as presented by Jesus. Modern evangelism is preoccupied with decisions, statistics, aisle walking, gimmicks, prefab presentations, pitches, emotional manipulation and even intimidation. It’s a simplistic message of shallow faith based on cheap grace. Unbelievers are told that if they invite Jesus into their hearts, accept him as personal Savior, or believe the facts of The Gospel, that’s all there is to it. But the aftermath has been tragic. Multitudes of people who have professed faith in Christ with no real change in lifestyle or submission to Christ. Who knows how many people have been deluded into believing they’re saved when they are not?”

Another pastor put it this way—

“Much of contemporary evangelism is woefully deficient in confronting people with the reality of their sin. Preachers offer happiness, joy, fulfillment and anything else that is positive to try and get people to come to Christ. Most of our witnessing centers on a person’s emotional or psychological needs and then offers Jesus as a quick cure for the problems of life. That’s why churches are full of people whose lives are basically unchanged. They have been told that coming to Jesus would in some way meet their needs, take care of their problems, bring them happiness—and don’t get me wrong that’s true but only if they are willing to abandon the self-life, receive Jesus, take up their cross and become a servant of Christ.”

Again, we need to change our presentation of The Gospel, so that we don’t become “salesmen” for Jesus packaging and presenting The Gospel as a miracle cure all for the aches and pains of life—without dealing with the core issues of sin and surrender.

→ **LISTEN:** *Palau crusade and the young woman I talked to that came forward to accept Jesus.*

Now I realize that when you talk to people about God being a ‘God of wrath’—some people get upset about that because they either can’t understand or refuse to accept the notion that the God of love they have come to believe in—can at the same time be a God of wrath and judgment.

Lord Bertrand Russell in his book, *“Why I Am Not a Christian”* expressed it this way—

“There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ’s moral character—and that is that He believed in hell. I do not feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment. Christ certainly as depicted in The Gospels did believe in everlasting punishment, and one does find repeatedly a vindictive fury against those people who would not listen to His preaching... You do not, for instance, find that attitude in Socrates. You find him quite bland and urbane toward the people who would not listen to him, and it is, to my mind, far more worthy of a sage to take that line than to take the line of indignation.”

What is on display here is the so-called ‘wisdom of the world’—which James tells us does not come from God but rather is: *“earthly, sensual, and demonic.”* (James 3:15)

Russell is reasoning from the natural, unsaved mind (or as the Bible calls it—the ‘*reprobate mind*’)—and to the reprobate mind the wrath of God (God’s judgment on sin) always seems uncouth and repulsive—including and especially Jesus’ death on the cross. (Comment)

However, all statements like this prove is that—the people who make them really don’t know God and certainly don’t understand the nature of a holy, righteous God. But this idea coming from *Christian* leaders that we should not use God’s wrath and hell as a motivation for people to get saved when we share The Gospel because it’s too negative is absurd.

I challenge you to find an old hymnal from around a hundred years ago or older and check it out.

You'll find hymn after hymn on the wrath of God, on the vengeance of God and on the judgment of God—hymns that are very much like the *imprecatory* psalms in the Book of Psalms (which was the hymnal of Israel used in the Temple for the worship of God).

Let me read you how one author defines psalms of imprecation:

"An imprecation is a curse that invokes misfortune upon someone. Imprecatory psalms are those in which the author imprecates; that is, he calls down calamity, destruction, and God's anger and judgment on his enemies. This type of psalm is found throughout the book. The major imprecatory psalms are Psalms 5, 10, 17, 35, 58, 59, 69, 70, 79, 83, 109, 129, 137, and 140.

When studying the imprecatory psalms, it is important to note that these psalms were not written out of vindictiveness or a need for personal vengeance. Instead, they are prayers that keep God's justice, sovereignty, and protection in mind.

While Jesus Himself quoted some imprecatory psalms (John 2:17; 15:25), He also instructed us to love our enemies and pray for them (Matthew 5:44–48; Luke 6:27–38). The New Testament makes it clear that our enemy is spiritual, not physical (Ephesians 6:12). It is not sinful to pray the imprecatory psalms against our spiritual enemies, but we should also pray with compassion and love for people who are under the devil's influence (1 Timothy 2:1). We should desire their salvation. After all, God "is patient . . . not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Above all things, we should seek the will of God in everything we do and, when we are wronged, leave the ultimate outcome to the Lord (Romans 12:19)."

Listen, most Christian poets and song writers don't write many if any imprecatory poems and songs today—and that may or may not be a good thing, I'll let you decide for yourselves.

I personally gravitate to and connect with Christian songs that extol the love and grace of God—after all we are living in the New Covenant period—the age of grace:

John 1:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

John 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

But I think it's important that we read imprecatory psalms as a regular part of our devotional lives for this main reason—we will never be able to grasp the depth of God's love for fallen sinners until we understand how deeply He hates sin.

That's why Paul, in presenting an epistle that has as its theme 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ'—doesn't even bring up the love of God until Chapter 5!

The love of God is a beautiful and blessed thing—but again, you'll never appreciate how great His love is toward fallen *sinners* until you appreciate how great His hatred is toward *sin*.

Once you begin to comprehend how much God hates sin—and hates it utterly and profoundly—only then will you begin to comprehend God's amazing love for you as a sinner!

→ **LISTEN:** Illustration of a jeweler placing a diamond on a piece of black velvet.

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