

A Wonderful God

Romans 1:18-32

We get into trouble or cause trouble when we think we know the reasons for something, yet we really don't know. Paul has stated the priority and power of the gospel to bring salvation to those who believe. Now he gives some reasons why the gospel is so important and a priority for God and us.

I. God's wrath against sin is justified; 1:18-20.

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ 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 men are without excuse.

Paul wrote that in the gospel a righteousness of God is being revealed. He now adds that from heaven the wrath of God is also being revealed. God's righteousness and His wrath are integrally connected. If God responded to wickedness with tolerance, He would not be righteousness.

God's wrath falls on people, godless and wicked, who suppress the truth. You can only suppress something you know. As a result, human beings do have knowledge about God. He has revealed it to them, displaying some of His divine qualities in the world He has created.

If God exists, people reason, then He must be a good God who would never be angry with us or do anything that might inconvenience us. This view of God is far from the biblical view of a righteous God whose nature demands that He react negatively to sin.

Every person is guilty of rejecting a knowledge of God universally available. He is showing why the revelation of God's righteousness in the gospel is necessary, sending His Son to die on a cross.

Truth cannot be changed, but it can be rejected or suppressed. Wickedness denies truth to justify itself. God has revealed to all humans something of His eternal power and nature. Yet people refuse to believe. Their blindness is self-imposed. To deny God as Creator is to invite His wrath. All people are without excuse.

II. There are consequences to suppressing the truth; 1:21-31.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. ²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. ²⁸ Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. 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, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Knowing God should lead to honoring Him and giving thanks. God gives to all the basic requirements for life. But people put their own god or sin in place of the truth God has revealed. God reacts by handing them over to the consequences of the choice they have made.

Their thinking becomes futile and their foolish hearts are darkened. They pride themselves in their own wisdom, and they exchange the glory of the immortal God for their own self-made images. Although they claim to be wise, they become fools.

As a punishment for this idolatry, He gave them over to the consequences of their sinful desires. This involves an ever-increasing cycle of sin, but sexual sins are highlighted, because of the severity of the consequences.

There are various shapes that idolatry takes. All are prone to put something in the place that God alone deserves. That idol may be something evil or a pleasure to lure us from the devotion to God that He deserves and demands.

The second exchange further explains the connection between idolatry and sexual sin. Paul both unpacks this sexual sin in terms of homosexuality and introduces the third exchange. Paul uses the Greek words for "female" and "male" to emphasize God's creation of human beings into these two categories. The implications about proper sexual conduct flow from that created difference.

Women exchanged natural relationships for unnatural ones, and men likewise abandoned natural relations with women. Homosexual behavior is an obvious indication of the way human beings have turned from the true God. Nature in this passage does not refer to individual human nature or orientation but to the world as God has made it. Homosexual activity violates God's created, natural order and intention in making human beings male and female.

Paul uses homosexuality as evidence of idolatry and depravity. He then indicates its consequences, that they received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Paul is specifying ways in which God's wrath is inflicted on human beings.

Turning away from true knowledge of God means cutting ourselves off from any ultimately accurate understanding of this world and our place within it. No wonder that people do not understand the moral stances that Christians take based on God's truth.

People end up doing what ought not to be done. Paul provides several examples of this sinful conduct. People who reject God have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity. This is a list of general terms for sinful rebellion.

People who reject God are also full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. This is a list of horrific sins that affect human relationships.

People with depraved minds then are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil, they disobey their parents, they are senseless, faithless, heartless, and ruthless. These are results of sinful behavior from ignoring God's rule. These are horrendous sins that destroy the fabric of society.

Turning from God and trusting your own mind leads inescapably down the path into moral darkness. Although people know that those who do such things deserve God's wrath, they not only continue to do them but also encourage others to follow the same course of action.

In a moral universe it is impossible to turn from the truth of God and not suffer the consequences. People who do not know God are those who have made that choice. This is why the gospel is a priority for God and for us as His children. All sin deserves the wrath of God, but God has given us a choice of faith to gain His righteousness through Jesus.

III. With the certainty of God's wrath, people continue to promote sin; 1:32.

³² 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.

Human beings are able to understand God's truth. All people possess a moral knowledge, knowing that those who do such things deserve death. People do have a God-given sense of right and wrong and understand that wrong actions deserve death. Death is spiritual death, eternal death, and the very wrath of God under which all human beings stand because of sin.

Paul argues that it is just as evil and rebellious to approve of those who practice sins as it is to do them yourself. Paul rebukes those who lead others into sin by their approval of it. We are not only damning ourselves, but we support others in doing those things that we know will bring the wrath of God upon them.

Conclusion

Why is the gospel so important? God's wrath against sinful people is justified. There are consequences to our suppressing of the truth. Take sin seriously in your life and the life of others. God's wrath is certain. With the certainty of God's wrath, people continue to promote sin.

God revealed His righteousness in the gospel because He has revealed His wrath against sin. There is a critical need for righteousness. All those outside of Christ are in need of salvation.

Therefore, we are not to be ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last.