

Righteousness or Wrath
Romans 1:17-25
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INTRODUCTION

Jesus saves. But what does He save us from? The wrath of God in this world and the next, the power of the devil, and from ourselves. God saves sinners. Sin destroys our minds and darkens our consciences, it robs us of reason and joy, until we reject every good thing and hate most what might heal us. But that is just the beginning: self-focus turns to self-deception and to self-destruction; we demand that God leave us alone so we may follow our own path, and He does.

Jesus died and rose again to save us from the path of sin and to bring us to a bright, splendid and endless life. But we must accept His way and follow Him.

You must receive God's righteousness by faith, be thankful, glorify him, and cling to His truth! Follow truth at all costs and do not trade your relationship with God for anything!

Romans 1:17 The Righteousness and Wrath of God

Vs 17 "The Righteousness of God" is being blameless before God – God looking at you and saying "you are perfectly innocent and holy, even as I am perfectly innocent and holy." The righteousness of God is either earned by living a perfect life, or received as a free gift given to those who trust in faith.

Why is the righteousness of God so important to us? Because the wrath of God is also revealed... All people are either under the righteousness of God or under the wrath of God. Where are you?

Vs 17-18 both righteousness and wrath are being revealed at this very moment and each is the context for the other. You cannot accept the righteousness of God without acknowledging the wrath. And you cannot accept the full wrath of God without acknowledging his saving righteousness because the wrath is sent from heaven, by the Lamb of God (Revelation, chapter 6).

Verses 17 and 18 are tightly linked. God's righteousness is being revealed in the Gospel of our past salvation (Jesus death and resurrection), our present salvation (our obedience to the faith and sanctification), and our future salvation (our glory in heaven). And God's wrath is being revealed in the past judgment of sin (Jesus death on the cross), the present judgment of sin (God giving sinners over to their own sin), and the future judgment when the world-system is destroyed. So, all of history is the revelation of God's mercy and justice.

Vs 18 God's wrath is appropriate, deliberate anger directed at deliberate ignorance and evil.

"Ungodliness"- this word means "refusing to worshiping with humility." So, this "ungodliness" emphasizes that we proudly refuse to obey God. "Unrighteousness" emphasizes mankind's evil to each other. We wrong God and our neighbors with every kind of wickedness.

All of our ungodly and unrighteous acts are manifestations of the defining fact of sinful lives: we suppress the truth. The wicked and godless actively hold the truth down and keep it from interfering with their horrible decisions.

Vs 20 All people have received some knowledge about God. Here God's power is "eternal" in the sense that it is continual, reliable, and faithful throughout all time. God is the one true constant in all reality and although He is invisible, He makes himself clearly understood.

Acknowledge the true danger of God's wrath and gratefully accept his free gift of righteousness!

Romans 1:21-22 The Darkened Mind and Heart

Vs 21 "They knew God" Evil does not start with ignorance, but with willful denial. We all have a knowledge of God that we cannot easily escape. Our problem is not that we do not know, our problem is that we know to do good and chose to do evil.

This evil is first and foremost a denial of the truth of God. All personal wickedness and social injustice, all sin private or public, starts with a denial of God's glory and a refusal to be thankful to Him. This attitude of the heart quickly begins to destroy our minds.

"Vain in their imagination" - "Imagination" means "logic" or "thought process." Our thinking becomes subject to the same type of vanity that we read about in Ecclesiastes: pointless, futile, without lasting meaning. Ungratefulness creates in us a clouded mind that becomes increasingly confused until finally..." **their foolish heart was darkened.**"

Our entire inner person becomes darkness. We lose the ability to rightly order our thoughts and affections and we begin to lose the ability to tell lies from the truth so that...

Vs 22 "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,"

This dark, twisted, and pointless path begins with a very simple choice: suppressing the truth. The suppression of truth gets worse and worse until you lose the wonderful awe of the love of God and the joyful happiness of thanksgiving.

By suppressing the truth we leave ourselves cynical, callous and finally unable to tell the difference between wisdom and foolishness in our own lives. We become fools insisting that we are wise.

You must accept the righteousness of God by faith or you will be lost on this path.

Willful denial or what you know to be true, willful ingratitude for what you know to be good will still cloud your mind and destroy your ability to tell good from evil. The most terrifying aspect of the darkened mind is that those who are most ignorant are convinced, absolutely convinced, that they are smart.

Watch for the signs of a darkening mind: not glorifying God, not being thankful to God, and insisting that you are wise.

Your soul may still be secure in Jesus, but you can still turn your life on earth into a fountain of misery for you and those that love you.

Train yourself in accepting the truth, revering God, and practicing thankfulness!

Romans 1:23-25 The Terrible Exchange

Vs 23 and 25 Now that our hearts are darkened, we lose the ability to make sound decisions and rush forward in our soul-destroying stupidity. We exchange the glory of the un-decaying for an image of the decaying.

This damnable exchange took the form of worshiping images of creatures and men, but the heart of the sin of idolatry is anything before God in your heart or life. Whatever you serve at the expense of your relationship with God is your idol!

Nothing, nothing in heaven, on earth, or in Hell is worth trading for your closeness to God. Cling to God in truth at all cost!

Vs 24 Once we start down the dark path of sin, the only thing restraining us is the grace of God. If we persist in godless ingratitude, He will give us what we want: a life without Him. And we will find that life to be a living death.

“uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts” God still loves us and will work to get us to open up to him. But if we refuse, He leaves us in the filthy shame that we surround ourselves with. And our hearts become dark, squalled, stinking prisons, only locked from the inside. And it only gets worse from there.

The process of the wrath of God is not an impersonal cause and effect, rather it is the personal revelation of God. The early stages of the revelation of his wrath are that he simply allows us to experience the dark consequences of our bad decisions. But if we persist in sin we will actively experience the wrath of the Lamb of God which comes from Heaven (Rev 6:15-17).

Vs 25 We gave up the truth for lies, but we could not stop being religious. We will always worship and serve something, it is how we are made. So we “worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator.” The word translated “ungodliness” in Vs 18 is a negation of the word the same word “worshiped” in this verse.

How tragic is the fall of man! We were "un-worshipful" to God who deserves worship, only so we could fill our lives with the worship of those who do not deserve worship.

This is why we need a savior!

CONCLUSION

The wrath of God is as justified, real, and important as the righteousness of God. It is the context of the Gospel and what we really mean when we polity say “Jesus died for you”.

God's wrath is poured out on those who refuse His mercy because they suppress the knowledge of God within themselves and trade the one whose name is "Wonderful" (Isa 9:6) for a cheap idol.

You must turn to God from idols! “...To Serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come (1 Thess 1:9-10).”

All who forsake thankfulness and reverence for God suffer a darkened mind. Embrace thankfulness and reverence or you will shut yourself up in the little prison of their small heart and demanding that God leave you alone. And eventually, He will.

Embrace thankfulness and reverence or you risk being given over to the lies that you loved so much.

Practically, how can a Christian more thankful and reverent?

1. First, see from this passage the danger of ingratitude and irreverence: it is a kind of dementia of the soul that will destroy your ability to make good decisions and rob you of all joy.
2. Make a conscious effort to notice, remember, and thank God for good things in your life – starting with your salvation make a conscious effort to think about the good things God has given you. (1 Thes 5:18).
3. Know the promises of God and keep an eternal perspective in times of hardship. In hardship thank God for His promise that He will work this for your good. (Rom 8:28)
4. Participate in worship and especially meditate on your redemption. There is a long tradition of calling the Lord's Supper "the giving of thanks". The serious meditation on the gifts and promises of God produces thankfulness. (Col 3:15-17)
5. Surround yourself with good things and notice the beauty of creation. Our God is a God of joy and beauty, he made good things to be enjoyed. Enjoy good things fully but don't become so obsessed with the gift that you forget the Giver. (1 Tim 6:17)

If your life is not defined by thankful reverence your mind will be darkened. If your life is not defined by thankful reverence, and you call yourself wise... "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,"

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful (Col 3:15)."

The entire project of Hell has been to get us to exchange God for idols; life for death, glory for shame, pleasure or misery, and love for wrath. The overarching message of the World-system is that you should trade your closeness with God for something else.

You must receive God's righteousness by faith, be thankful, glorify him, and cling to His truth! Follow truth at all costs and do not trade your relationship with God for anything!