

The Wrath of God
Romans 1:18-32
1-25-2026

One thing about preaching through books of the bible, you can't really skip those passages you don't like such as the one we are on today.

As I begin, I want to do something a little different this morning.

I want to read a portion of what has been considered by many to be one of the greatest and most powerful sermons ever preached in America.

As I do, compare it with the message of the songs we tend to sing, the verses we most like to quote, and the messages we most want to hear about God.

It's titled Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. That title alone is enough to set some off who only want to think and hear about the love of God.

Jonathan Edwards first preached it in his own church in Northampton, Massachusetts, then again in a church in Enfield, Connecticut on July 8, 1741. God used it to convert thousands during the Great Awakening.

Your wickedness makes you as it were, heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf, and your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence, and best contrivance, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spiders web would have to stop a falling rock. Were it not for the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you for one moment; for you are a burden to it; the creation groans with you...There are the black clouds of Gods wrath now hanging directly over your heads, full of the dreadful storm, and big with thunder; and were it not for the restraining hand of God, it would immediately burst forth upon you.

The wrath of God is like great waters that are damned for the present; they increase more and more, and rise higher and higher...your guilt in the meantime is constantly increasing, and you are every day treasuring up more wrath; the waters are constantly rising, and waxing more and more mighty; and there is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, that holds the waters back, that are unwilling to be stopped, and press hard to go forward. If God should only withdraw his hand from the flood gate, it would immediately fly open and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God would rush forth with inconceivable fury, and would come upon you with omnipotent power...

The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood...it is nothing but his mere pleasure that keeps you from being this moment swallowed up in everlasting destruction.

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; His wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire;...you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours.

O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in; it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you, as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder; and you have no interest in any Mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment.

I could continue with the rest of his sermon which would take about a half hour, but think you get the idea.

Bear in mind, he preached this to his own church!

Besides his tone and message, his delivery of it would only add further to our difficulty and would be even more of a turnoff for modern hearers.

It wasn't what we would consider polished and professional, positive, affirming, and entertaining.

He didn't roam the front of the sanctuary free from the use of notes.

There was no self-help advice or video clips, no jokes or touching and amusing stories to engage his audience.

When he preached this sermon, historians tell us he likely remained tied to his pulpit as he read it word for word from a complete manuscript.

He rarely looked around and never made eye contact.

And he did it all in a flat, monotone voice that would put most of us to sleep.

Yet for him, content and fidelity to God's word were of paramount importance.

And instead of dozing off or daydreaming while he spoke, people were on the edge of their seats, many weeping uncontrollably

As one person described it in his diary,

Before the sermon was done there was such a great moaning and crying out through the whole house — "What shall I do to be saved?" "Oh, I am going to hell!" "Oh what shall I do for Christ?" and so forth — so that the minister was obliged to stop. [The] shrieks and cries were piercing and amazing.

It's not exactly the type of message any of us would look forward to when we come to worship.

Most probably wouldn't stand for it or come back the next week for more because it runs so contrary to what people are looking for, wanting to be encouraged and uplifted and perhaps even entertained, not condemned.

The wrath of God, an angry God, the judgement of God all seem so foreign to messages on the love and compassion and mercy of God.

so much of contemporary talk is only about things like the abundant life in Christ, the joy and blessings of salvation, and the peace of God which faith in Christ brings with little about how he feels about sin and judgement.

this was seen in a story in the London Times a few years back which reported that 14 church study groups had looked at the Old Testament Psalms and concluded that 84 of them, that's more than half, were not fit for Christians to sing because they spoke of the wrath and vengeance of God which they said were not compatible with the Christian gospel of love and grace.

yet Paul will tell us in chapter 3, *"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."* (Romans 3:10–12)

And, All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23).

That's why we need Jesus!

And it is why Paul didn't shy away from talking about God's wrath

As we continue in Romans, Romans 1:18-32 says,

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 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 people are without excuse. 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. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts

***with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. 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, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. 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."* (Romans 1:18–32)**

The word for wrath does not refer to a sudden emotional outburst like what happens to us when someone upsets us or does something we don't like
It's not capricious but rather it refers to righteous indignation, God's natural reaction to sin which is so contrary to his nature and all he has and does for us.

Verses 18-20 are the flip side to verses 16-17
for just as the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel, he now says, the godlessness and wickedness of man reveal His wrath

They reflect the two sides of God's nature—love and justice, mercy and judgement

In love he gives us the gospel to save us just as his justice demands that those who reject his love face the consequences.

Douglas Moo wrote, "the wrath of God is not, of course, an emotional rage but a steadfast and absolute opposition to all that is evil. It is essential to the character of God: 'As long as God is God, He cannot behold with indifference that His creation is destroyed and His holy will trodden underfoot. Therefore He meets sin with His mighty and annihilating reaction'"

- I. As we look at the passage, we take note of just what it is Paul says, that arouses God's wrath and makes him angry

Notice he doesn't say it is the result of the things we would typically think of, particular sins that we sometimes hear people rail against but rather he says these are the result of a much deeper and more serious issue

Paul says he finds it abhorrent that people seek to suppress and cover up the truth about God
Efforts to redefine him and make him less than he is
To deny and even replace Him, bowing down to idols made in our own image and desires instead

In spite of all he has done to reveal himself and his nature, his love and grace, people choose instead to ignore and reject him so they can serve lesser things, making idols on men and power and position, desire and success.

God refuses to share his glory with such base things

He does not hide and is not removed from his creation, but rather his nature and grace are not concealed but clear for all to see

no one can say I didn't know because he has put himself out there for all to see

what may be known about God, his power and nature, are obvious Paul says, so just look around

therefore, he says we are without excuse

"The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all peoples see his glory." (Psalm 97:6)

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." (Psalm 19:1-4)

his nature, his glory and his message are all around us if we take the time to look

In emphasizing this point, in his commentary on Romans, John MacArthur wrote:

With giant telescopes such as the 200 inch diameter instrument on Mount Palomar in California, astronomers can observe objects 4 billion light years away, a distance of more than 25 septillion miles. At any given time, there are an average of 1800 storms in operation in the world. The energy needed to generate those storms amounts to the incredible figure of 1,300,000,000 horsepower. By comparison, a large earth moving machine has 420 horsepower and requires 100 gallons of fuel each day to operate. Just one of those storms producing a rain of 4 inches over an area of 10,000 square miles, would require energy equivalent to the burning of 64,000,000 tons of coal to evaporate enough water for such a rain. And to cool those vapors and collect them in clouds would take another 800,000,000 horsepower of refrigeration working night and day for 100 years.

Agricultural studies have determined that the average farmer in Minnesota gets 407,510 gallons of rainwater per acre per year. The state of Missouri has some 70,000 square miles and averages 38 inches of rain each year. That amount of water is equal to a lake 250 miles long, 60 miles wide, and 22 feet deep.

The US Natural Museum has determined that there are at least 10 million species of insects, including some 2500 variety of ants. There are about 5 billion birds in the US, among which some species are able to fly 500 miles non-stop across the gulf of

Mexico. Mallard ducks can fly 60 miles per hour, eagles, 100 miles per hour, and falcons can dive at speeds of 180 miles per hour.

The earth is 25000 miles in circumference, weighs 8 septillion, 588 sextillion tons, and hangs unsupported in space. It spins at 1000 miles per hour with absolute precision and careens through space around the sun at the speed of 1000 miles per minute in an orbit 580 million miles long.

The head of a comet may be from 10,000 to 1 Million miles long, have a tail 100,000,000 miles long, and travel at a speed of 350 miles per second. If the sun's radiated energy could be converted into horsepower, it would be equivalent to 500 million, million, billion horsepower. Each second it consumes some 4 million tons of matter. to travel at the speed of light across the Milky Way, the galaxy in which our solar system is located, would take 125,000 years. And our galaxy is but one of millions.

The human heart is about the size of its owner's fist. An adult heart weighs less than half a pound, yet can do enough work in twelve hours to lift 65 tons one inch off the ground. A water molecule is composed of only 3 atoms. But if all the molecules in one drop of water were the size of a grain of sand, they could make a road one foot thick and half a mile wide that would stretch from Los Angeles to New York. Amazingly, however, the atom itself is largely space, its actual matter taking up only one trillionth of its volume.

Except to a mind willfully closed to the obvious, it is inconceivable that such power, intricacy, and harmony, could have developed by any means but that of a master designer who rules the universe.

God reveals himself and his love every single day, sacrificing his own son to show it, yet people choose to reject and turn their backs on Him and remain in ignorance so they can do their own thing, and Paul says that makes him angry

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 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 people are without excuse.” (Romans 1:18–20)

Far from being all doom and gloom, because of his great love for us, the wrath of God which is directed against those things which mankind would seek to replace him with, means that He refuses to let us go without a fight

- II. A second point Paul makes deals here about God's wrath deals with how it is expressed

Paul says it is not primarily through fire and brimstone but three times in this passage, Paul says because of what they were doing in seeking to reject and replace him, God gave them over or as the NLT puts it, he abandoned them to their sin

- So in verse 23 he says *“they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.”* (Romans 1:23) **THEREFORE** verse 24 says God gave them over to their sinful desires, or as the NLT puts it, God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired.
- In :25 *“They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.”* (Romans 1:25) **THEREFORE** verse 26 says God gave them over to their shameful lusts
- And in :28 he wrote, because they refused to retain their knowledge of God, literally they refused even to acknowledge him
so in verse 28 he says for the third time, **THEREFORE** God gave them over to their depraved or worthless minds with the result that they embraced all sorts of sin instead

in the end, as both Psalm 115:8 and 135:18 state, we become like whatever we choose to worship

God's wrath is expressed by our choosing our sin over Him

I find this passage one of the most disturbing passages in scripture, the idea that man can so harden our hearts that the God who so loved the world that he gave his own son for us, God will finally just give up and say go ahead and then let us face the consequences of our choice.

this idea is popularly stated as, God doesn't send anyone to hell, they choose it for themselves

God will never force himself on anyone.

This doesn't mean he stops loving us and wouldn't take us back in a moment, but love cannot be forced or coerced.

It must be freely given and freely received.

So in His great love, even if it causes him pain when we reject him, nevertheless He lets us choose for ourselves whether to follow him or not

If you don't want Jesus in your life and all he offers, thinking instead you can find a better way on your own, he won't stop you

That we would reject him and his love, preferring instead our idols and our sin makes him angry.

before he really gets into the gospel and the importance of faith, Paul begins his letter to the Romans with this strong warning about the wrath of God because until we recognize that we are sinners and stop trusting ourselves and our idols, we will not be able to accept the salvation God offers in Christ.

Salvation which the baptisms earlier symbolize and which is open and freely available to all

as Paul will say in chapter 10, everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved

to quote the words of the Ethiopian Eunuch to Philip in Acts 8:36, "See here is water! What prevents you from being baptized?"