

In View of God's Mercy - Week 2

Romans 1:18-2:11

The Christian community in Rome was struggling. Jewish and Gentile Christians were at odds with one another. There were theological misunderstandings to be sure, but the real problem was pride - ethnic and cultural pride. Pride was fracturing their fellowship, extinguishing any zeal for gospel advance, and dishonoring God. Paul wrote his letter to unify them around the gospel.

“The good news is the gospel of God, about Christ, according to Scripture, for the nations, unto the obedience of faith, and for the sake of His Name” Stott

The Righteous Shall Live by Faith

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

God's Wrath on Unrighteousness

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

God's Righteous Judgment

² Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. ² We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. ³ Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵ But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

⁶ He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ For God shows no partiality.

(Ro 1:16–2:11)

The Righteous Shall Live by Faith

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

Let's remember the goal:

- Paul is encouraging Christ-followers towards confidence in the work of Christ,
- Urging them towards a whole-life response to the gospel in view of God's mercy
- Reminding them the gospel is the POWER of GOD for SALVATION to EVERYONE who BELIEVES

This is really good news – but from 1:18-3:20 – an indictment against the sinfulness of humanity is laid out, helping the church in Rome (and now us) see that everyone has a problem with sin before a HOLY GOD and that ultimately, the only solution is saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Remember – pride was a problem with the church in Rome, ethnic, cultural, social and religious (or unreligious) backgrounds were mixed into this group of Christ followers – and Paul is helping them see the grace of God (which will lead to humility and unity) by helping them see just how bad things really are apart from Christ.

What is the wrath of God?

- Stott: "The wrath of God is almost totally different from human anger, God doesn't lose his temper, fly into a rage, or is ever malicious, spiteful or vindictive. The alternative to wrath IS NOT love, but neutrality in the moral conflict. And God is not neutral. God's wrath is his holy hostility to evil, his refusal to condone it or come to terms with it – God's wrath is his just judgment upon it."

Against what is God's wrath revealed?

- The wrath of God is directed against evil alone...
- God's wrath is being revealed against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth
- Stott, "God's wrath is being revealed against the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth.. It's not just that they do wrong though they know better. It is that they (people who suppress the truth) have made a deliberate decision to live for themselves, rather than for God and others, and therefore deliberately stifle ANY TRUTH which challenges their self-centeredness."

How is God's wrath revealed?

- God's wrath will be revealed at the end in the judgment of the last day – Paul calls Judgment Day "the day of God's wrath"
- Paul will later speak of God's wrath in Romans 13 that is revealed through the public administration of justice
- God's wrath is also being revealed now... and this is Romans 1

God's Wrath on Unrighteousness

¹⁸ For the wrath (gk - divine punishment based on God's angry judgment against someone) of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

The wrath of God (angry judgment against people) is revealed - against ungodliness and unrighteousness of men – who by their unrighteousness suppress (hinder/restrain/push down) the truth

¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

People are without excuse. All people apart from Christ stand condemned.

²¹ For although they knew God, (limited knowledge of God's power and glory available to everybody through general revelation, i.e. creation, universal sense of right / wrong, natural/ moral law) , they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²

Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

People did not honor him AS GOD. People did not give THANKS to GOD.
 People became futile in their thinking. People's hearts were darkened.
 People became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Part of God's present wrath against sin is being revealed – and rather than intervening, he does the opposite. He hands people over to their sin and consequences.

We see three times:

- God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts
- God gave them up to dishonorable passions
- God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done

We see that lust leads to the dishonoring of bodies among people – and the reason why is because the truth about God was exchanged for a lie – and instead people worship creatures rather than the Creator. Lust was an idol then, just like lust is an idol now.

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

We see God giving people over to dishonorable passions – these passions are based on sinful human desire to worship and serve a creature, rather than their Creator, and this handing over to dishonorable passions looks like sexual sin outside of God's design. Sexual sin – is misdirected worship. Idolatry.

We know that God's design for honorable passion goes back to creation, where God made male and female to be together, work together, live together – Genesis 2:24 says, "²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

Jesus affirms this and says this in Matthew 19:4-6, "⁴ He answered, 'Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? ⁶ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.'"

We live in a culture where everything is subject to re-definition, where there are no absolute truths, where love is defined by the user, in the moment, always subject to change. God is not like that.

God's design for sex is between a husband and wife, and is designed with purpose, pleasure, protection, procreation, and permanence in mind.

Anything outside of that design is sexual sin... and this is Paul's point: Don't be shocked by people "doing whatever they want" – with all the lust that leads to all the dishonoring of bodies among people, of relationships contrary to natural design, with all the consuming passions, with all the shameless acts that people are proud of – all of this indicates part of God's present wrath against sin. God is (and has been) handing people over to their own sin.

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Paul continues – since people didn't think it worthwhile to acknowledge God – a long list of antisocial activities follows. In other words, a depraved mind will lead to evil, greed, wickedness with damage in mind, jealousy, violence, conflict, deception, habitual fighting, gossiping words, insulting words, people that hate God, people who are arrogant and lovers of themselves, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless and ruthless.

³² Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Not only is this what people do – they also give approval to those who practice these things. People commit evil acts. Invent evil acts. Approve of others doing evil acts.

Paul's description of Gentile (non-Jewish society) in verses 18-32 paint a picture of sinful human behavior, of what unrighteousness looks like – and then he turns to those who practice moralism. In one sense, the camera angle changes from the unrighteous to the self-righteous.

Many believe Paul is next addressing the Jewish people, and for sure in 2:17 he does – but it's worth noting that not all Gentiles were living this way. FF Bruce points out that, *Stoicism was also prevalent in the Roman world. Nero's tutor Seneca would "exalt great moral virtues, exposed hypocrisy, preached equality of all human beings, he acknowledged the pervasive character of evil, he daily practiced self-examination, and he assumed the role of a moral guide."*

Stott points out two groups that Paul takes aim at in 1:32 and 2:1

- People that do these evil things and give approval to those who practice them (lost in sin)
- People that do these evil things in in hypocrisy and condemn others who do them (self appointed judges)
- Stott *"Paul uncovers our tendency to be critical of everybody except ourselves, we are often as harsh in our judgment of others as we are lenient towards ourselves. We work ourselves up into a state of self-righteous indignation over the disgraceful behavior of other people, while the very same behaviour seems not nearly so serious when it is ours rather than theirs."*

In 2:1-11 – we see that God's judgment against self-righteous, self appointed judges is inescapable (1-4), righteous (5-11), and impartial (11-16).

God's Righteous Judgment

2 Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. ² We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. ³ Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵ But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love – and God's kindness is intended to give us time and space to repent – but God's kindness does not give us an excuse to sin or go on sinning. To put it another way – DO NOT presume upon the riches of his kindness.

⁶ He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ For God shows no partiality.

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Paul will make the argument in Romans that salvation is by grace through faith.

Paul will make the argument that justification is by faith and faith alone.

Paul is also making the argument that judgment will be by works.

Justification by faith. Judgment by works.

Paul says in Romans 12 – to offer your life as a living sacrifice.

Paul says in Galatians 5 - that our faith in Jesus expresses itself through love

James, the brother of Jesus – says “I will show you my faith by my works” (James 2:18b)

What about the last judgment? Will our sins be remembered? Will they be revealed? Anthony Hoekema puts it wisely like this: “The failures and shortcomings of . . . believers . . . will enter into the picture on the Day of Judgment. But — and this is the important point — the sins and shortcomings of believers will be revealed in the judgment as forgiven sins, whose guilt has been totally covered by the blood of Jesus Christ.”

John Piper says it this way, “Picture it like this. God has a file on every person (the “books” of Revelation 20:12). All you’ve ever done or said (Matthew 12:36) is recorded there with a grade (from “A” to “F”). When you stand before “the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10) to be judged “for what [you have] done in the body, whether good or evil,” God will open the file and lay out the tests with their grades. He will pull out all the “F’s” and put them in a pile. Then he will take all the “D’s” and “C’s” and pull the good parts of the test out and place them with the “A’s”, then put the bad with the “F’s.” Then he will take all the “B’s” and “A’s” and pull the bad parts out of them and put them in the “F” pile, and put all the good parts in the “A” pile.

Then he will open another file (“the book of life”) and find your name, because you are in Christ through faith. Behind your name will be a wood-stick match made from the cross of Jesus. He will take the match, light it, and set the “F” pile, with all your failures and deficiencies, on fire and burn them up. They will not condemn you, and they will not reward you.

Then he will take from your “book of life” file a sealed envelope marked “free and gracious bonus: life!” and put it on the “A” pile (see Mark 4:24 and Luke 6:38). Then he will hold up the entire pile and declare, “By this your life bears witness to the grace of my Father, the worth of my blood, and the fruit of my Spirit. These bear witness that your life is eternal. And according to these you will have your rewards. Enter into the everlasting joy of your Master.”

This is why we keep asking – in view of God’s mercy – what does my whole-life response look like?

In view of God’s mercy – how do we respond to this?

1. **Humble ourselves.** I am sinful, not just you. We are sinful – not just “they are sinful”. I need Jesus, you need Jesus, they need Jesus. Help me remember the Gospel as I help you remember the Gospel – and together, we have been given this ministry to proclaim this Gospel, to the ends of the earth.
2. **Remember, God is grieved by sin – but never defined by sin.** Jesus took on our sin, took on our punishment for sin – but only by choice, only by love. God is the definition and standard of what is right, good, and Holy. So any human endeavor to redefine what God has defined and designed, is simply further indication that debased thinking is really misdirected worship.
3. **When we see people living in ways** outside of God’s design, we should first be humble, and remember that we are not responsible for other people’s choices, but we are responsible for how we live and how we love other people. Lead with grace, live out the truth, remember God’s kindness leads us to repentance.

