



Romans 1:18-32
The Reasons for the Wrath of God

Summary: We walk into wrath when we walk away from God.

This morning we're going to talk about a difficult subject – the wrath of God. It will take us some time to get there, but we'll eventually have six things to say about wrath. First, though, it's important to understand that God gave us two different options for life and only one ends in wrath.

You see, it's important to know that (Gen 1:1) [in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth](#) – and that (Genesis 1:31) [God saw everything He had made](#) – from mountains to the moon to manatees and mankind – [and indeed it was very good](#). The Bible tells us God made us in His own image. He blessed the first man and woman. God gave them dominion over all the animals and plentiful food that grows from the earth. He told them, 'Go make babies and fill the earth' – discover it, explore it and all its possibilities; make something of it.

This is the life God intended us to have, the life He designed us to enjoy - life anchored in a nourishing relationship with Him while *experiencing love for* and *receiving love from* our neighbors. We were made for a life marked by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23); a life without fear or anxiety (Phil 4:5) or selfish ambition (Phil 2:3); a life of purity, peace, hope, and joy where people look out for each other and not just for themselves.

So, what went wrong?

How did we get here? How did we get to a world full of unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, hate, violence, pride, (Rom 1:29) and all the other plagues of our modern lives from COVID to cancer?

The answer is – people chose it. Consciously and unconsciously, knowingly and in ignorance, people choose to go against the plan and path God laid out and suffering is the result. Notice what we read here in Romans.

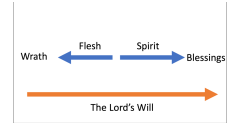
Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

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If you're taking notes this morning notice God made a world with two possible paths.

Two Possible Paths

The Bible describes these as *walking in the Spirit* – walking in step with God – in line with His purposes and plans, or *walking in the flesh* – making choices based on our ideas, feelings, and desires.



When we walk in the Spirit, we walk in sync with God and His intentions and toward an eternity with Him. As a result, we are blessed. When we walk in the flesh, we walk against or away from God and toward or into His wrath. We go against the grain of the universe and the way it was made to work, so we shouldn't be surprised to pick up splinters.

We spoke about this in-depth last week. We noticed that from the very beginning of time God has been revealing Himself, helping us to see the path of blessing that He wants us to walk, calling us to look outside ourselves and look to Him. But, the natural inclination of the human heart is to ignore God, to pretend like we didn't see Him or hear Him or tell ourselves that's not really what He says or wants.

By default, people want *some* of what God offers, but not all of it. And so, they try to create a higher power according to their personal tastes, like ordering at Chipotle. 'I'm trying to cut carbs, so no burrito for me. I'll take a bowl. And could I get some extra guac?' People carry that same mindset over to the spiritual aspects of life. Instead of a loving, personal, Creator God, they want something that looks like part of creation instead. Look at



[22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.](#)

Again, this is what people do by default, they walk according to the flesh and its desires. The problem is, this leads further and further away from God over time.

And, when people choose this path over and over God eventually [gives them over](#) to it- a phrase we find repeated three times in this passage.

It's sad but true: people can only resist God for so long. Eventually, He lets them go completely. It's a pattern we see repeated throughout Scripture – Pharaoh in the story of the Exodus is probably the most well-known example, but there are others. People harden their hearts against God and His ways, and eventually God gives them what they really wanted anyway. He leaves them alone.

When He does, the outcome is not what you might first expect. Instead of finding joy, peace, and satisfaction now that God has finally let them go, they consume themselves and others

in the never-ending search for something to fulfill the thirst and hunger in their soul. Notice the next stage in the sequence:

Romans 1:24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for the 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 vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

Over the next several weeks we are going to do a deep dive into sexual sin of all sorts from pornography to homosexuality to adultery and abortion and here's why.

Sexual sin is characteristic of the path of wrath

Here in Romans 1 sexual sin is presented as the fundamental essence of choosing to walk in the flesh. I want you to think about that – really consider it. Especially if there is any temptation toward sexual sin in your life. Consider the fact, that *of all the sins that could have been named* here, sexual sin was put forward as *the primary, life-marking evidence*, of people who have consistently and persistently suppressed the truth of God and who have been given over by Him to wrath as a result.

Friends, that should frighten us.

You see, we learn this fundamental lesson on the first pages of Scripture, that God created man and woman, and gave the two of them to each other with the intent that they share a life-long monogamous relationship, that the two should become one flesh, and that what God had joined together should never be separated by anyone or anything. They were to have children and live together in holy, happy, harmony.

Second only to their relationship with God, their exclusive relationship with each other was to be the absolute bedrock foundation of their life and purpose. This was to be an essential component of walking in the Spirit and enjoying all the blessings God baked into the system of life.

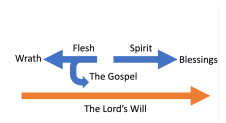
When people step outside of it – through sexual activity before marriage with a boyfriend or girlfriend, or as part of the hookup culture, or immersing your mind with sex outside of marriage through the stuff you're reading on your Kindle or looking at on your phone, or pursuing relationships with someone who is not your spouse, or of the same sex, or attempting to alter your sex – there are many ways to step outside God's path – when we do, we step into God's wrath.

So, again, we're going to take the time to talk about all of this. We'll talk about pornography and what to do if it's a part of your life. We'll talk about why it's wrong. We'll talk about how you can quit, completely. And we'll talk about how to respond if you discover someone you love is caught in its trap.

We're going to talk about homosexuality and the various paths that lead people there and how we should respond when we find the desire in ourselves or in someone we love.

Along the way, we'll talk about things like adultery and abortion – again, all the ways that things can go wrong with God's good gift of sexuality when we choose to walk according to our own desires instead of following God's clear instructions.

I'm hoping, and praying, and asking you, the church, to join me in praying that God uses this time to speak to us, to call us – through the gospel – to walk the path of blessing instead of wrath. I'm praying, and asking you to join me in praying – that this is the summer God rescues people, redeems people, sets people free from the sins they've been struggling with for years, or sets in place the firm convictions, boundaries, and habits that will keep people from sin in the years to come.



I said last week and I'll say again, I'm expecting to see prayer requests, counseling requests, and deep, hard, conversations – but what I didn't make clear is that I'm not expecting all of those to come to me. I expect them to come to you - that we would share our burdens one with another, turning to people we know and trust and saying, "can we talk? Would you pray for me, pray with me?" Turn to the people in your home group or Turn Aside group and invite others into the messy parts of your life. People won't be shocked. They may be grieved, they may be saddened, but your situation doesn't make you weird.

I expect that things we're looking at are going to shake things up in the lives of teens and grandparents, singles and married couples, that some of you will be embarrassed to get it out while others can't wait to finally talk about it, that for some people it's been a long time, but you're still bothered by it and for others, it was just last night. I expect that for some it's a regular habit and for others, it's an occasional slip.

Whatever your situation is, I'm praying that we will all come out of the shadows and walk in the light, with each other, toward Christ.

I'm praying that those under the wrath of God will come out and be saved. And that those who have been saved, but find that these things are still part of their lives, will reapply the gospel in a targeted way and find freedom from ensnaring sins. That they will finally know and understand that the gospel that saved them can also sanctify them. God's power is not limited to eternity, it affects our lives here and now. If God can raise Jesus from the dead, He can put sin to death in you.

I'm also praying that those of you who aren't dealing with these things in your life would be equipped to counsel those who need help. Maybe you've already slain this dragon, maybe

you've fought your battles and got your scars, or maybe this isn't your thing, you struggle in other areas – I'm praying you would find answers to give, learn how to listen, and know how to encourage and pray. And finally, that you would see how the tactics and principles we discuss here apply not only to sexuality and sexual sins, but to all other sin as well.

After all, sexual sin may be lifted out as the primary evidence of our brokenness, but it's not the only one. Paul goes on to list many others – and they can all be overcome through the strength and the power of the gospel. Keep reading with me:

28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, 30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; 32 who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

Last week we noted that all of these flow out of the fact that God reveals Himself – to everyone, everywhere, but people suppress what could be known about Him and this is the result.

This week I want to emphasize the point where we started this morning – that there are two ways to live: we can walk by the Spirit which leads into blessings or we can walk according to our own desires, ideas, and impulses which leads into God's wrath. So, let's talk about this difficult concept and how we can escape it.

God's Wrath Defined

The first question we want to ask is what is God's wrath and what does that even mean, after all, I thought God was a god of love. I thought He was gentle and kind and that no matter how bad people mess up, everything's going to be OK and we all get to Heaven somehow.

That's a popular understanding, but it's not accurate or biblical.

According to the Bible, God is driven by both justice and mercy. And you wouldn't want it any other way. We all want justice. When someone sins against us we want them to be punished, we want things to be made right. We want justice. The problem is, what happens when we sin? All the sudden we want a loophole or for it to be overlooked, or excused or understood. We love justice when it benefits us, but want to avoid it when we're the proper target of justice.

Well, the outcome of God's justice can be characterized as wrath. And here are few important things to know or consider.

God's Wrath: Reaction, not rage

First, God's wrath is a reaction, but it's not emotional. We tend to think of wrath as going off in a rage, throwing an adult-sized temper tantrum. We never see God act that way. He is not emotionally unhinged or spiteful. God is love, that's His natural, default character. That's who and what He wants to be – love is spontaneous for God.

Wrath is called out of Him in reaction to wickedness. Think about this, because it's super, super important to understand – no wickedness, no wrath. No wickedness, no wrath – something has to draw wrath out of God. But love naturally flows.

OK, but what is wrath? Theologian John Stott defines it like this, he says the wrath of God is

His holy hostility toward evil, His refusal to condone it or come to terms with it, His just judgment on it.

Another way to say it, as we've hinted at this morning, is it's the absence of God's blessings.

God's Wrath: Absence of Blessings

Blessings come from being on the path God has designed for life – think of the difference between swimming with the current or against it, flying with the Jetstream at your back instead of in your face.

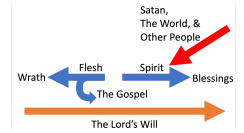
The cruising speed for a Boeing 787 Dreamliner is Mach 0.85, which is around 561 miles per hour. But just a few months ago, in February, a Jetstream over the Atlantic was moving at speeds in excess of 235MPH up at 35,000 feet. When you add the speed of the wind to the speed of the aircraft, you get amazing results. A flight from NJ to Portugal hit a peak ground speed of 835 mph and arrived an hour ahead of schedule by flying in the Jetstream.



Now, that's not a perfect analogy because some theologian is going to come along and remind us that, "Actually, the jet provides it's own power and we're powerless to do anything on our own for God." OK, fine, we can make it a rudderless ship in the water to illustrate total depravity if you want – but it still conveys an important concept – when we are carried along by God's flow, there is an ease and power in life.

But how much fuel do you burn trying to fly in the opposite direction, if you're flying into that wind, swimming against that current? How much stress and strain and struggle is involved? So much that you might not even get where you're going. God ensures that the way of the sinner is hard.

The way of the saint is not always easy, to the contrary, it is often hard. But the resistance Christians experience has a different source. It comes from the cross-currents of other sinners in our lives, having a demonic enemy who opposes us, and living on a broken planet where things are just hard at times – from injuries to illnesses to natural disasters, corporate consequences of the fall blow across our lives and try to push us off course. The difficulty doesn't come from God, it comes from other sources out of alignment with Him.



There are three main ways the wrath of God is experienced. Let's start at the back and work our way to the front.

God's Wrath: Future

Ultimately, there is a final and eternal experience of God's wrath - the permanent removal of His blessings in judgment and hell. Those of you who did the Turn Aside study in 1 Thessalonians may remember that it speaks of [the wrath to come](#) (1 Thes 1:10). Without God's gracious intervention this is the destiny of all people, for, as we will see in the coming chapters of Romans, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (3:23), in other words, we're all guilty by His judgment.

That's in eternity. But God also pours out His wrath today, here and now. One way that's supposed to happen is through government.

God's Wrath: Through Government

We'll see this later in Romans, but according to Scripture the purpose of government is to promote what is good and to punish what is evil.

Listen to what Scripture says about governing authorities:

Romans 13:4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

Government is a tool ordained by God to execute wrath on those practice evil. It is meant to be a restraining force in the world. Unfortunately, governments lose sight of this purpose and begin to promote evil and punish good – a trend we see increasingly today. And so, God also builds wrath into the experience of life.

God's Wrath: Present

If you were here last week you remember that in verse 18 of Romans 1 we see that the [wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness](#). The grammar there is in the present tense – it's happening right now and it looks like a life filled with the kinds of sin we see listed in this chapter – beginning, fundamentally, with sexual sin, but

including all kinds of other harmful practices from violence, to pride, to lying and arrogance – all of which not only break our relationship with God but make life increasingly difficult with other people and for ourselves.

This is the wrath of God, and it's a terrible way to live. It's the way of splinters leading to an eternity of suffering.

Thankfully, if we walk in the flesh, God makes it possible for us to reverse course. He offers to pull out the splinters, heal our wounds and our hearts, put us on the path of blessing, walk with us, guide us, and give us the strength we need to keep going. This is called the gospel – the good news - and the Apostle Paul is excited to share it with people in Rome.

Do you remember?

Romans 1:16 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.”*

God made a beautiful world and created us to have a beautiful life – to walk in the Spirit and experience His blessings. He revealed Himself and we suppressed the truth, we choose to walk in our own desires and go against the grain – pretending not to see or hear what God has revealed or keeping ourselves so busy that we don't really have to think about it.

But God in His mercy, continues to call out to us – and if we will hear, if we will come to Him and confess our sins, admit that we are going or have gone the wrong way, He will forgive us, deliver us from His Holy wrath, and invite us into the life of blessing that comes from being with Him. A life we live by faith.

God's Wrath: Atoned

That life is made possible by the substitutionary atonement of Jesus. Remember, justice demands that all wrong be punished. But, Jesus steps in and mercifully receives the punishment for us. That's what the cross is all about – the wrath of God poured out on Jesus instead of being poured out on you. It's a pretty good deal – your wrongs are forgiven and you're invited into the stream of blessing.

It's what we celebrate when we receive communion which we're about to do. So, the question is, are you ready to receive it? Consider your life, are you walking in the flesh, or in the Spirit? Are you under the blessings of God or under His wrath? Which jersey are you wearing?

Now is the time to switch teams if you're on team wrath.

And, if you're on team righteousness, there may still be some things in your life that are objects of wrath – there may be some habits and attitudes, behaviors in your life that God hates. If so, you know it - confess them.

Apply the same gospel that saved you to the specific issues that plague you. Ask God to forgive you. Repent. Turn away from sin and ask God to guide you by His Word and His Spirit into the life that Jesus is calling you to. Choose the splinter-free life of blessing from walking with God. It's available to you. It's the life God always wanted you to have.

Whoever you are, whatever path you're on – why not take the next minute or two, reflect on these things and your relationship with God. He is reaching out to you – offering forgiveness, help, and strength. Tell Him what you need. Tell Him what you've done wrong. And then, come forward and receive the elements of communion – tangible reminders of what He has done to pull us out of wrath and into blessings.

But first,

Let's pray.



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

Romans 1:18-32

The Reasons for the Wrath of God

Summary: We walk into wrath when we walk away from God.

- **Exploring the Two Paths:** How do you personally interpret the concept of walking in the Spirit versus walking in the flesh? Can you share specific examples from your life where you've experienced one path over the other?
- **The Nature of Sin:** How do we distinguish between "acceptable" and "unacceptable" sins in our culture, and what implications does this have for our spiritual walk?
- **Addressing Sexual Sin:** Why do you think sexual sin is highlighted in this text as a significant indicator of walking in the flesh? How can we address issues of sexual sin compassionately and biblically?
- **God's Wrath and Justice:** Discuss the idea that God's wrath is a reaction to wickedness rather than an emotional outburst. How does this perspective change our understanding of God's character and His relationship with humanity?
- **The Role of Government:** What do you think is the appropriate role of government in promoting good and punishing evil? How can believers advocate for this role in their communities?
- **The Importance of Community:** How can we create a safe and supportive environment for discussing struggles with sin?
- **The Power of the Gospel:** How does understanding the gospel as both a message of salvation and a means of sanctification impact your faith? In what ways can we apply the gospel to our daily struggles?
- **Choosing Blessing over Wrath:** Reflect on the phrase "choose the splinter-free life of blessing." What does this look like in practical terms for you?

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

1 John 1:9

* AI was used to generate discussion questions based on the sermon I personally wrote. I then reviewed and modified the AI-generated questions.

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