



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Wrath and Grace

March 17, 2019

Romans 1:18 (19-20)

Clint Pressley

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, 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 people are without excuse.

(Pastor prays)

The very idea of a wrathful God goes against the American “folk gospel” of good morals, good manners and good neighbors. In fact, the anger or wrath of God is a stumbling block for many Christians because it goes against the wishful thinking of a God of lucky charms and happy endings.

But a Gospel that presents a God with no wrath is a Gospel that doesn't save or sanctify or have any power. It's a short-sale Gospel, a truncated Gospel, a Gospel that might gum you to death but will never sink its teeth in. That's not a Gospel, that's a fairy tale.

This text says that the wrath of God is revealed, that God is perfectly angry all the time with a holy fury. That word wrath, or *Οργή*, is a settled, determined indignation. It's not a loss of temper or momentary emotional outburst. Furthermore, God's wrath operates not through His intervention but precisely through Him not intervening. In fact, you'll hear it in a terrible refrain in verses 24, 26, and 28, “God gave them up.” The degeneration of society is a judicial act of God's wrath.

So as our world continues to devolve into further and more ungodly conditions, we get a fuller picture of His wrath and a greater urgency to share the Gospel of Jesus. Verse 18 is a change of tone. We go from Paul talking about God's saving righteousness in verses 16-17 to the revelation of God's anger in verse 18. This section goes from Romans 1:18 - Romans 3:20 and

tells us that God's wrath is rightly revealed against all people, both the Jews and the Gentiles since all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. And Paul's aim here is to show us that the whole of humanity is morally bankrupt and in danger of God's wrath and only the Gospel can save.

We need to understand the wrath of God because when we do, we will love the Gospel more and share the Gospel more. In fact, it motivates us to ask the question, "Who's your **one**?" Because you believe the wrath of God is real and only the cross of Jesus can save. I'm going to ask you to do three things: **identity** someone, **pray** for that someone, and **share** the Gospel with that someone in hopes that God would awaken their heart to believe. Because we trust that ...

The Wrath of God Points Us to the Grace of God

The Wrath of God Tells Us Why We Need the Gospel

You can see this best if you read verses 16, 17, and 18 all together and pay attention to the "for" at the beginning of verse 18. ¹⁶ *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.* ¹⁷ *For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."* ¹⁸ *For the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness,*

We need the Gospel because the wrath of God is revealed here against **all**. Here is where Paul is sharing with us why the Gospel is so urgently necessary. The "all" in verse 18 is important because there are no exceptions and nothing is overlooked. We can't say that God doesn't mind some evils. His wrath is revealed against every wrong. Verses 16-17 says that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes. Verse 18 tells us it's because the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven.

You see, the Gospel is necessary because there is such a thing as the wrath of God. The entire weight of the "good news" found in verses 16-17 rests on verse 18 being true, that all people, apart from the Gospel, are right now living under the anger of God.

When we weren't Christians, Paul says in Ephesians 2:4, we were children of wrath like all of mankind. Now follow the logic here. Since the anger of God is being revealed against sin, there

can be no real way of salvation that doesn't deal with sin and that brings us to the cross of Jesus. It's the cross of Jesus that shows us the measure of God's wrath.

Forgiveness is not a cheap gesture by God. It is as costly as the blood of Jesus. Furthermore, if you don't believe in the wrath of God, then why do we need the cross? The cross of Christ is meaningless without the wrath of God. Unless there is something to actually be saved *from*, there is no point in us talking about salvation.

And, as if this point needs more strength, in verse 18 Paul says the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven, showing us the scope and majesty of God's wrath. That reminds us that the all-seeing eye of God has this wide view. It reminds us of the extent of His furious wrath. That the wrath is from Heaven reminds us that whatever is under Heaven and yet not under the Gospel is actually, right now, under God's wrath.

This presses us further to ask the question of **who** is the **one person I am going to pray for and share Christ with?** Who's your **one**? Because the wrath of God tells us **we** need, **they** need, the Gospel.

The Wrath of God Tells Us the Sinfulness of Sin

Let's take another look at verse 18 and read it until the end. ¹⁸ *For the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness,*

Let's chop this up and see what the wrath of God is being revealed against.

All Ungodliness - Asebia

Godlessness. This word means "against God." Here is the essence of sin. The essence of sin is the futile attempt to get rid of God; and, since that's impossible, then it's the attempt to live as if God doesn't exist.

Think of it like this. If you have the 10 Commandments. The first four have to do with God, so they are vertical. And Paul is saying that the wrath of God is revealed against all those who don't know God or have created a "god" in their own likeness. This is all those who break the revealed will and holy law. That means this is everybody. Here is the sin that separates us from God and shows us how we need the Gospel. This also speaks to all the corruption of a *false*

gospel; especially the “prosperity gospel” that isn't a form of Christianity but instead is a pagan religion that exploits the worst in people.

And so, Paul tells us that idolaters’ worship has called for the wrath of God and only the Gospel has the power to save us from His fury. We could probably say more here but let's move on.

Verse 18 tells us the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and

All Unrighteousness of men.

If godliness is vertical, then righteousness is horizontal. Or if you think about the 10 Commandments, the last six have to do with life here on Earth and how we treat other people. They start with “honor your father and mother” and end with justice and how we deal with relationships. And verse 18 tells us that God is pouring out wrath because of the unrighteousness on Earth or the treatment of one another.

Unrighteousness is not just choosing to do the wrong thing even though you know better. It's making a real time decision to live for yourself rather than for God, regardless of the cost. In fact, notice the wording in verse 18 and contrast it with verses 16-17. Verse 18 says, God's wrath is revealed against man’s unrighteousness. Verse 17 says, in the Gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed *from* faith *for* faith.

Think of it like this: We need the *righteousness* of verse 17 because we are *unrighteous* in verse 18. We need the *grace* in verse 17 because we are under the *judgment* of verse 18. We need the *Gospel* of verse 17 because we are under the *wrath* of verse 18 and we need the cross of Jesus.

There's something else in verse 18 that the wrath of God is revealed against. Let's look at it. The wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who, by their unrighteousness, suppress the truth.

Suppress the Truth

To suppress the truth is not passively ignoring. This is the idea of actively holding something down. It's an internal aggressive striving against the truth. The Bible says that God has written eternity into the heart of man and woman. And every person who is without Jesus is in a constant process holding down the truth and therefore subject to God’s abiding anger.

To suppress the truth is to press and stifle anything that challenges your own personal desires or way of thinking. What is the truth that men have suppressed? The truth is there is **one** God. He created us in His image and we can only know God on His terms, and those terms are found at the cross where Jesus took the wrath of God in the place of sinners and now gives grace and forgiveness to anyone who believes. The wrath of God points us to the grace of God at the cross of Jesus.

Part of our tradition here at Hickory Grove is to sing in worship, pray together, hear the sermon and then we offer a time to respond. And I want to do that a little differently today by offering the invitation in three specific and distinct ways. First, I want to open the invitation to any of you today who have been awakened to the fact that you— right now— are living under the wrath of God, and the only reason you still live is the arbitrary *grace* of God that is not covenanted to you. Now, you have heard the grace that is offered to you and you realize you can have His mercy. I'm just inviting you to come forward.

The second group of people that I'm going to invite today are already believers, so the matter of you not being a Christian is settled, but you are in a very real spiritual struggle and you want somebody to pray for you. It's what we do on the Lord's Day: God's people pray for one another.

Here's a third group of people I want to invite, and this is the widest and broadest group. You've heard the "Who's your one?" challenge in the middle of this sermon and maybe you already thought of one person. You've identified that one you want to start praying for, that one you're going to share the Gospel with. If you would like to make the Lord's Day the first time you're going to pray for that person, I want to invite you, as part of the invitation, to come forward where you can symbolically say, "I'm going to start my prayers for this person today. "

(Pastor prays)