



Our greatest problem

What is our greatest problem? The Bible says it is the anger and judgement of God upon our sin. In the Bible, the apostle Paul says that he's not ashamed of the gospel because it answers this problem that we all have. In one of the most solemn and frightening parts of Scripture, Romans chapter 1 verses 18 to 32, we are shown the depth of sin in the human heart and God's holy reaction against it. If sin is a reality, then so too is divine wrath, and the only answer to God's wrath is God's love in the gospel.

Present reality

The message of Romans 1 is that we won't take God seriously, and therefore we can't take sin seriously. The result of this is that 'the wrath of God is being revealed' (verse 1). This

is expressed in the present tense, showing that it is not something reserved only for the future but is now a present reality. God never excuses sin. If nothing else does, the cross ought to convince us of this. On the cross sin was not excused—it was punished, and Jesus bore that punishment. There is a day coming called the Day of Judgement, when the wrath of God will be poured out on all those who have not trusted in Jesus for forgiveness and salvation. Jesus said they will be cast into hell where for all eternity they will endure divine judgement. God's wrath is as eternal as his love.

All this is terribly true, but it's not what Paul is referring to in Romans 1. Here he's not talking about something future, but something present. God's wrath does not come now as it did in Noah's day, in a flood that destroyed all (Genesis 7-8). Nor is it as in the time of Sodom and Gomorrah, when fire and brimstone fell on those cities (Genesis 19). It comes now, says Paul, in a more terrible way. Three times in this passage (in verses 24, 26 and 28) he says, 'God gave them over to their sin.' God holds back his restraining grace and says, 'If you want sin, then have it: have your fill of it, and see where it leads.'

It's as if God says, 'If you want to make sex the main thing in life then do so, but see the results—tens of thousands of abortions each year, adultery breaking down family life, and AIDS killing people. If you want materialism then have it, but there is a price to pay—the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, with all the terrible social consequences of crime, unemployment and starvation in the third world.'

People ask, 'Why are things so terrible in society today?' Here's the answer—God gave them over. A society is made up of individuals, and how we live as individuals determines the fate of the society in which we live. Sex, drugs, crime and greed are destroying the world because we will not take sin seriously.

The gospel's answer

The only answer to society's problem is the gospel, because it alone can deal with God's wrath against sin. In Romans, Paul deals with God's wrath right up until chapter 3 verse 21, when he says, 'BUT ...' From there he begins to present to us the good news of what God has done.

Out of enormous love and concern for the very sinners he is angry with, God planned the amazing way of salvation. The whole plan revolves around, and depends upon, the Lord Jesus Christ. As far as God was concerned, and judged by his standards, there was not one single righteous person in the world. There was no one he could call 'good'. But God sent his sinless Son into such a world. So there was then one righteous man in the world. In other words, there was only one man God was not angry with because of sin. God said of Jesus, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.' What did God do with the sinless Jesus whom he loved deeply? Did he make him ruler of the world and command sinners to obey him? Did he exalt him and have all men and women bow to Jesus? He could legitimately have done all these things, but he did not. Instead he made Jesus a Man of Sorrows. He saw to it that his

Son was despised and rejected by men. And that was not all, because God himself turned his back upon Jesus, and he didn't do it reluctantly—Isaiah 53:10 says, 'It pleased the LORD to bruise him.'

What possible explanation can there be for all this? The explanation is found in the gospel. On the sinless Jesus, God laid all the sins of the people he was going to save. Jesus became responsible for paying the debt we owed because of our sin. On the cross, the Saviour bore our sin and guilt, and the wrath and judgement of God that we deserve. Instead of falling upon us guilty sinners, the terrible divine wrath fell upon Jesus, our sin-bearer, upon the only righteous and good man in the world.

Because Jesus was righteous and good, he was the only one who could bear our sin. That's why God sent him into the world. If God was to save sinners, there was no alternative. On the cross the judgement of God fell upon the beloved Son of God. Jesus died forsaken by the Father, bearing our sin, in our place. He paid the debt we owe for all the laws of God we have broken and all the sin we will ever be guilty of. Thus the holy demands of God are fully met. Our sin is punished. Wrath is turned away from us, and the love and grace and mercy of God come to us instead.

This is God's answer to our greatest problem—our sin.

THE GOSPEL, THE ONLY ANSWER TO OUR PROBLEMS



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