

ROMANS 1-4: What Makes a Man a Believer

What's Wrong With US?

Rough Transcript

Brett Clemmer

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Hey, guys. Welcome to the Man in the Mirror Bible Study, I'm Brett Clemmer and the topic for today is **What's Wrong with Us?** We're going to be studying Romans 1 verses 18 to 32. So, if you have a Bible, go ahead and grab it and turn it to Romans one. My mom lives in a senior living facility up in Michigan, I live in Florida and because of COVID I've really not had the opportunity to go see her for months now, but I get to talk to her almost every night on the phone. I give her a call and sometimes we have a conversation where I'll say, "Hey mom, how you doing?" And she'll say, "Well, I'm okay." And I say, "Well, what do you mean you're just okay?" And she said, "Well, I was watching the news." And I know that once she says that she was watching the news, that she has seen stories of violence and injustice, she's seen stories about racism and viruses.

She's seen stories about economic hardship, with people losing their jobs and debates over schools and political upheaval and there's just all of this difficult, difficult news. People really behaving badly often, in our society. And when you look at the world around us and all the difficulty in it, you have to ask the question, what is wrong with us? Why can't we seem to treat each other well? Why all this harmful and hateful rhetoric? Why all this difficulty with racism, with brutality, with looting and violence, with murder? And crimes against ... There's just so much negative in the world. Why in the world is it like this? And Paul is speaking into a culture in Rome in the first century, that has many of these things going on.

Think about where Paul came from in Jerusalem, in Israel, you had a Roman occupying army. There was brutality there in the way that they treated the people. There was constant political bickering going on, both inside the church and outside the church. There was poverty. All of those same things there and then you look at Rome and Paul's going to tell us some of the stuff that he sees in Rome and the depravity that's there. And so, you have to look at humankind and say, "Well, what's wrong with us? What is wrong with us?" And so, the first thing that I want to talk about is I want to talk about the fact that God makes himself known. So, you may say, "Well, the problem is we are a godless regardless country, or we're a godless nation, a godless world." Well, we're not a godless world. There is a God and the Bible is very clear, Paul's very clear in this passage, in Romans that not only is there a God, but he makes himself known.

Now, this is a concept that's known as general revelation and general revelation is not specific, it's not to a certain person receiving a certain message, for a certain time. General revelation is what we can all see. So, we can all see the stars in the sky. We can see order versus disorder. We can see a moon that orbits round a planet like the Earth. So, there's laws of physics and the Earth rotates around the Sun and the Sun is in the Milky Way galaxy, which is rotating in the universe and we see things holding together. One of the books that I've been reading is ... I've been studying for this passage, to teach you today, is this book called Romans by John Stott. I would really encourage you if you can, go get a copy of this book Romans by John Stott. As we're teaching and if you're really into what we're talking about, you might really enjoy this book as well.

And so, when John Stott, Dr. Stott talks about general revelation, he actually quotes a surgeon and an anthropologist. He said, the surgeon wrote, "I'm filled with the same awe and humility when I contemplate something of what goes on in a single cell, as when I contemplate the sky on a clear night, the coordination of the complex activities of the cell and a common purpose hits the scientific part of me as the best evidence for an ultimate purpose." An anthropologist, Dr. Stott goes on to say, "Anthropologists have noted that in every culture, there is some kind of a system of morality. There is a definition of right and wrong, even though those definitions may change from culture to culture, the idea of there being a right and a wrong and of rewarding right and punishing wrong, there is an order that is general revelation, that shows the God exists."

And in Romans one, and sort of in the middle of this passage, we see this as well. Paul says in verse 19, "For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made, so they are without excuse."

THE INVISIBLE, UNKNOWABLE GOD... IS SEEN AND KNOWN

And so, what we see here, and this is our first point of this passage is that the invisible, unknowable God is visible and knowable in certain ways. Now, you obviously can't see all of God. You obviously can't know all about God, but you could know a lot about God. You can see the evidence of God's existence, in the order that's in the world.

And so, Paul says, because of this that they are ... At the end of verse 20, "So, they are without excuse." And so, as we look at the world, I think the first thing we need to recognize is that because of general revelation, because the invisible, unknowable God has made things visible about himself, has made things knowable about himself, man is without excuse. So, what's wrong with us? If we can see the evidence of God all around us, why are we still so stuck in all of these horrible habits and this evil?

THE WRATH OF GOD

And so, that brings us to our second point, which is the wrath of God, the wrath of God. Now, when we hear the term wrath, we think of human wrath.

In fact, there's a hymn, one of my favorite hymns is called In Christ Alone. And there is a lyric in that hymn, that goes, "And on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied." And I've heard of churches that they don't like that line, they'll will actually change that line. They don't like to talk about the wrath of God, it makes God seem so mean, but that's only because when we talk about the wrath of God, we're talking about the wrath of God from a human perspective. We're saying, well, if I get angry in a certain way, God must get angry in a certain way. But God's wrath isn't like man's wrath, man's wrath, man's anger is usually because our vanity, our pride has been hurt or because we want revenge or because we're angry. Right? And so, God's wrath doesn't come with any of those, what John Stott calls, those poisonous ingredients. "God's wrath is a holy hostility," John Stott says. A holy hostility to evil.

It's his refusal to condone it, to condone evil, or even to come to terms with it. It's his just judgment upon it. So, God's wrath is different than human wrath. God's wrath is a wrath that is holy and it is really an outcropping of his goodness. How could a good God not hate things that are bad? How could a good God who created us not hate things that hurt us, hurt the people that he created, and hurt and separate us from him? And so, that's what God's wrath is focused on. And so, if we look at this passage, go back to Romans 1:18, let's read about the wrath of God, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against what? All ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Now, the interesting thing about these two words in the original language is ungodliness focused on what? On God. Unrighteousness of man is actually focused on man.

So, it's our sin towards God and our sin towards our fellow man, so God's wrath is focused on both of those things. It's not a self-serving wrath, just well you're not treating me right. No, it's his perfection

and his love for us that are what is behind his wrath. And then, these next few verses talk about the fact of general revelation, that we have no excuse. And then, in verse 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." And so, what's wrong with us? Well, as we reject God, as we move away from God, our minds become darkened, we don't see things clearly. God is light, right? Jesus is the light of the world. He gives us clarity. He gives us the ability to focus and see things for the way they are. So, we move away from God, we move into darkness and futility in our thinking and in our hearts and the way that we feel.

"Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things." And so, what Paul is saying here is that these people, these people in Rome, right? So, they had all these temples with all these idols in them, he's saying, really saying, "How stupid is this? I mean, you can see God all around you and you're worshiping a statue. You actually think this inanimate object, this bird, or this reptile, or this statue of a man, that it actually has power that God doesn't have?" And so, he's saying then that God sees that, that's what brings about God's wrath. Well, what does God's wrath look like? Well, there's a phrase that gets used here over and over again and that phrase is, "God gave them up." And so, that's what God's wrath looks like, it looks like him giving us up.

So, we see in verse 24, "Therefore God gave them up in the lust of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves." Because why? "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator who's blessed forever. Amen. For this reason, God gave them up to dishonorable passions, for their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature, 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." Now, this is one of those tough passages in the Bible, it's addressing homosexuality and it's saying that when we exchange the truth of God for a lie, when our hearts become darkened and our minds become futile, one of the things that seems okay to us is to engage in homosexuality.

And there's lots of difficulty with this, there's people that have same-sex attraction and you say, "Well, I have a friend or I have a family member, and I love them, and they have same-sex attraction, and shouldn't they have the right to follow through on that?" And the Bible says, no, the Bible says that this is a sin, this is not how God made us to be. And I have different things that I'm attracted to, that I know aren't good for me. Now, you might say, "Well, it's not the same thing." And it's not the same thing, but it's similar. We all have things that we're attracted to that we think that we need to make us happy, but they won't make us happy because they're not the way that God made us to be. And there's plenty of folks out there that have struggled with this and found victory and there's people that struggle every day with this and they deserve our compassion and our love and our grace and our mercy.

They don't deserve to be ostracized, they don't deserve to be mistreated. They deserve them to be loved in their struggle, just the way that God loves us in our struggles that we have as well. And so, it's a hard passage. I wish it wasn't there, in a sense. I wish that this wasn't the way that God has ordained for us, but it is what he has called us to. And so, the Bible is clear in this and other passages that homosexuality is a sin. It's the result of our hearts darkening and our minds becoming futile. And so, God gave them up. This is what he has wrath against then, is these the sins that hurt us and that separate us from him. Verse 28, "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God..." So, you see this in every sense, right? Worshiping the creature rather than the creator, exchanging the truth of God for a lie, here we have, "Did not see fit to acknowledge God. God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done."

Now, in some translations, it'll say depraved mind, but man, look at this list of what happens to a person with a depraved mind. Now, do we experience all of these? No, but it's a great list of the different kinds of sins that we're led to, that God's wrath is against, his holy hostility is against these things. Why? In fact, this is our Big Idea, **God's wrath is a natural result of God's holiness. He hates sin that makes us less than what he made us for.** That's God's wrath. It's a natural result of his holiness. He hates sin that makes us less than what he made us for. So, look at the results of a debased or a depraved mind, starting in verse 29, "They're filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness, they're gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, and ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them, but they give approval to those who practice them."

And that's what's wrong with us because not only are we engaging in these behaviors, but people that are far from God, they're giving approval to others that are engaging in these things. And so, I look at this list and I say, well, I mean, I've done these things. I mean, I've been malicious. I've been disobedient to my parents. I've been faithless. I've been heartless. I probably even have been ruthless sometimes. What does that mean? Does that mean that God's wrath is against me? No, God's wrath is against those sins. Why? Because they're not what God made me to be. So, how do I then deal with that?

GOD AND CHARACTER

And so, that's our third circle here is God and character. So, the fact that I am worried, the fact that I hate when I sin, this is a great example of God's work inside of me. If I hate what God hates, if I want these sins to be out of my life, that's a sign that I'm trying to follow God. And so, that's where true repentance comes from, is when I can see these things in my life, these sinful things in my life, I can root out their cause, maybe I have an idol in my life, it's probably not a statue or a replica of a bird, but it could be the idol of competence, or the idol of power, or the idol of self-fulfillment. These things that I want for me, those things become more important to me than God, and then when that gets threatened, then these sins come out of my life.

And when I see that, I go, no, I don't want that in my life. And so, I go to God and I repent of those things and I say, "God, please change me." And the great part is, is that the verse right before our passage today shows us the actual solution to what's wrong with us. In verse 17, it says, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith." The righteous shall live by faith. Now, notice it doesn't say, the righteous shall live by strict obedience to every single one of God's specific laws, because God knows that we could never live up to that. And so, Christ came and Christ died on the cross so that our sins could be paid for, so that our belief in Christ's sacrifice means that we're clothed in Christ's righteousness.

And when the father sees us, he doesn't see our rap sheet, he sees Jesus' rap sheet and Jesus hasn't got a single offense on his rap sheet. And so, that becomes our record as well. So, that's the answer to what's wrong with us? So, if you're a disciple maker, if you're a mentor and you're sitting across the table from a guy and he's just lamenting about how bad he is and the evil that's in his life, and how horrible he's treated people and how down on himself he is about that, that's great news because the fact that his conscience is calling him to change, that's the spark of the Holy Spirit working in his heart. And you can reassure him, you can encourage him that, "Hey, this is a journey, but Christ's righteousness covers your sins. It's time for you to repent and turn away from those sins. It's good that you hate them. God hates them too. His wrath is against them, but his wrath is a holy hostility. It doesn't have the poison ingredients of human anger or malice."

So, praise God for his wrath because **God's wrath is a natural result of his holiness, and he hates sin that makes us less than what he made us for.** That's our Big Idea. So, let me pray for us today. Well, Father, we love your word, we love the lessons that you teach us through your servant, Paul, and Father,

I just pray for every man that's watching or listening to this study today, Lord, that we would look at our own hearts. We would look for the lustful thoughts that we have. Lord, we would say, I don't want these thoughts. I want to be more like Christ. Lord, for folks that are struggling with anger and malice and disobedience and all of these things that are listed, Lord, would you give us a holy hostility towards those things?

Would you help us to hate the sin in our life, Lord? Because we want to know you and we want to be close to you. And Lord, would you give us, as disciple makers, would you give us compassion and mercy, as we deal with people that may be struggling with deep, deep wounds and struggles in their own lives, that are leading to sin in their lives? And Father, I just pray that your grace would abound, that God's people would be known for our love and our compassion and our empathy and not our judgementalness and our rigidity and our haughtiness that's that's based on some false sense of holiness, Lord. Help us to love people like Jesus loved people, Lord. Help us to go to where they are and offer our help like Jesus did. And Lord, we pray that you would sanctify us, that you would use us, Lord, because we want to bring you glory. We want to build your kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen. Thanks guys.