

Are You Storing Up Wrath?

Scripture Text: Romans 2:1-11

Introduction

At the end of chapter one, Paul wrote about the unrighteousness of mankind, about those who reject God, commit various kinds of sin, and ultimately encourage others to sin. It might be easy to read through chapter one of Romans and say to ourselves, "I am sure glad that Paul was not talking about me. Other people need to straighten up, but at least I am Ok." Some people may actually believe that, but it is likely that most people realize they are not perfect. They may even admit they are sinners. We usually hear people say "nobody's perfect" or "everyone's doing it." There seems to be a general consensus that we should expect grace. Some say, "To err is human, to forgive is divine." All of this, of course, is true. We do err and God does forgive. Such thinking may suggest that we are expected to sin and God is expected to forgive us.

The Reality of Our Depravity

The problem for many people, if not all, is admitting the *seriousness* of our sin. Because this is so important to understand, Paul spent nearly three chapters of Romans describing our sin and God's judgement. We probably have no trouble agreeing with God about those "big sins." We believe those who murder or rape deserve harsh punishment, maybe even death. We most likely agree with God that those who do such things deserve His wrath. However, are we so quick to agree with God that His wrath should fall on those who are guilty of such "lesser sins" like envy, lust, or arrogance? Do you believe your pride or greed deserve God's wrath? If you do not, and I suspect that many of you do not, it means you do not have a proper view of your own sin nor a proper view of God's justice. The harsh reality is that we are a depraved people in the hands of an angry God. We all deserve God's wrath.

At the end of Romans chapter one, Paul wrote about several types of depravity. Last week, I called it the *downward spiral of sin*. Paul mentioned that mankind is depraved with sensual desires, both natural affections and unnatural affections. This depravity is exhibited in both heterosexual behaviors as well as homosexual behaviors. If you thought that God's wrath was reserved for homosexual sin, you are sadly mistaken. But, it is not only the sexual sins for which mankind is guilty. Mankind is also depraved with a worthless mind that leads to all sorts of sinful things. Paul listed many of these sins:

Romans 1:29-31 *They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.*

There is a lot in that list. Do you see yourself in it? According to God's Word, all who practice such things deserve to die. That does not put us in a good situation. Mankind is also depraved by not only doing various kinds of sin, but also encouraging others to sin.

We are in a pitiful state. We cannot claim ignorance of it, either. Those who turn from God sin against Him knowing it is wrong. And yet, not only do they sin, they encourage others to sin, which only intensifies their guilt and shame.

The Sin of Self-Righteous Judgement

By the time we reach Romans chapter two, the person each of us ought to be focused on is ourself. Sadly, that is not always the case. There is something else that increases our guilt — it is judgement. We like to be judges. What is it like to be a judge? You get to sit in a nice chair, hear opposing arguments, see evidence presented, and then make a decision that may dramatically alter the lives of many people. I think the best judges are those who not only follow the rule of law but who also seek all the facts before making a decision. A good judge can see through the veneer of personal perception and half-truths that people believe about themselves. The truth is, we all judge whether we realize it or not. Before we even have all the facts, we will make a judgement. The thing about judging is that we are far more critical of others than we are of ourselves.

In chapter two, Paul shifted from speaking of the unrighteous acts of other people, to another form of unrighteousness — *self-righteous judgement*. It is one thing to reject God and choose to do what you want. It is another thing to encourage others to also reject God and sin. It is quite another thing, to not only break God's law, but to also point your finger at others, condemn them for their unrighteousness, while *at the same time* claiming to be righteous yourself. Imagine that you received this letter from Paul, you got to the end of chapter one, and you agreed with Paul about those other sinners. You might say, "You tell them, Paul. Go get them." It seems that Paul expected that kind of response. Paul finished chapter one by writing to people in the third person — they do this and they do that — but, look at the change at the beginning of chapter two:

Romans 2:1 *Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges...*

It is as if Paul wrote about the depth of mankind's depravity of rejecting God and the various forms of sin, then he said, "But do not think *you* are Ok. You are the very person I am writing about." The truth is we are the ones who covet, deceive, gossip, slander, boast, disobey our parents and invent evil. We are the ones who are full of pride, foolishness, envy, and malice. Paul may have been primarily writing to his fellow Jews here, but we should not miss the point — we are also without excuse for passing judgement on others. We have rejected God and we have done all sorts of sin. This reminds me of Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee was self-righteous and thought he was Ok and even thanked God that he was not like other men, "even like this tax collector." Some of you are that Pharisee. You point your finger at others while at the same time, you are as much a sinner as they are.

We should remember King David's sin (2 Sam 12:1–14). The prophet Nathan told David a story of a rich man who killed a poor man's pet lamb. David agreed that the rich man deserved punishment and said, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die." But having passed judgment on another, David quickly learned from Nathan that

he had judged himself. Nathan said, “You are the man!” You have taken the lamb (Bathsheba) from the poor man (Uriah) for your own pleasure. David, though guilty of a similar and far greater sin, was blind to his own condition even while enraged at the sin of another person. Is that you? Do you think other people are worse sinners than you are? A self-righteous person easily forgets his own wrongs and feels that others’ sins are worse than his own. People tend to criticize in others those things of which they themselves are guilty, but at not so quick to judge themselves for the very same things.

God’s Wrath is Upon Us

The point is we are guilty! God’s wrath is upon us. Even though we might rightly realize we are not perfect, we err if we think that God is also not perfect. Even though we may rightly believe that we should not judge someone else for doing the same wrong things, we err if we think that God should not judge us. God is offended by sin! The Jewish people forgot this. Many Jews believed they were immune from God’s wrath simply because they were Jews. God had made a covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that their offspring would be a great nation. They were God’s chosen people. Many Jewish people thought that God’s final judgement was based on membership within a privileged group. Those who were part of the covenant community of Israel had nothing to fear for they were children of Abraham. Surely, the wrath of God would come upon those outside the Jewish covenant community, but not upon the Jewish people.

This might sound ridiculous to you. How could people think this way? However, many people think that because they are members of a church. They think their membership is their golden ticket into the kingdom of God. Some believe that because they have been a member of a church all their life, or because their parents were Christians, or because they give faithfully to the church, or because they have some position of importance in the church, or because they recited a simple prayer when they were a child, that they are right with God. However, we cannot appeal to any of these things, or anything else, *save one*, in order to escape God’s wrath. When we stand before Almighty God, we stand alone. I have to answer for my life by myself before the throne of God. We will answer to God for our sin, our as Paul put it “according to his works.”

God Judges Our Working Faith

Romans 2:6 [God] will render to each one according to his works...

God is not fooled. He knows our hearts. He knows our secret sins. He knows our works and will repay us according to our works. But you may say, “I thought we are saved by faith.” That is true. Paul later affirmed that everyone is “justified by faith apart from works of the law” (Romans 3:28). But in the immediate context Paul was not teaching how we are declared right with God, but how God judges the outworking of our faith. God does not judge your faith by some simple prayer or statement you made once in your life. God judges faith by the difference it makes in how a person actually lives. Jesus said something very similar:

Matthew 16:27 *For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.*

Saving faith produces life changing faith. There ought to be evidence of faith working in our lives. Sometimes, we are too busy judging other people and not judging ourselves. We are too busy believing the lie that we are good that we miss the point that our inward faith should show outward evidence. If it does not, you should ask yourselves, "Am I truly right with God? Is God's wrath upon me?" The Church ought to be the Bride of Christ, but oftentimes she is a harlot cheating on Jesus. We are saved by the grace of God and are being saved by the Holy Spirit and will be saved when Jesus, the Bridegroom, comes to get us. The issue is that we should not be complacent in our faith. We need to have a correct view of ourselves and we need to look for evidence of the faith we claim to have. Faith without works is dead (James 2:17).

Are You Storing Up Wrath?

In verse five of the passage today, Paul wrote the following:

Romans 2:5 *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.*

There is a pay day someday when God's wrath against sin will be ultimately realized. If you persist in rejecting God, continue in your sin, and reject the solution God has provided, you will receive the penalty for it. As you continue in this situation, you store up wrath for the final day of judgement. It is like saving all of God's wrath upon you for the final day. It is not God who stores up wrath, but you who store up destruction for yourself. Each time you reject God in favor of sin and choose yourself over Him, you deposit a little more anger, punishment, and judgement for yourself. You cannot afford to be self-righteous and judge others while at the same time being as lost as they are.

Paul wrote that in the final judgment there are two possibilities: eternal life on the one hand, and God's wrath on the other. Who will receive eternal life? Who will receive the wrath of God? Those who persist and endure in doing good will receive eternal life. Those who do not obey the truth but follow evil will receive wrath. God withholds wrath on us to give us time to repent. He wants us to turn to Him, but the period of grace does not last forever. In Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, he reminded his congregation of this, "O sinner, can you give any reason why since you have risen from your bed this morning God has not stricken you dead?" What Edwards meant was can you give a rational explanation for why God has withheld judgment from you right now? God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance. The choice is yours. Are you storing up wrath or are you going to live in His grace?

Conclusion

I think there are a couple of take-aways from this passage. For one, we can all find a place in the list of sins Paul mentioned at the end of chapter one. Each one of us is a

sinner separated from God and without Jesus Christ. We are storing up God's wrath upon ourselves. We cannot afford to waste our time judging others for their sins while doing similar sins. This does not mean that we do not point out other people's sins, but we are not to be self-righteous. We better first judge ourselves rightly. The person you need to be focused on is yourself. When you stand before Almighty God, what will your answer be for why you should be allowed to enter heaven? Will it be the good things you have done? Will it be that you are not as bad as someone else? None of these things matter. Get yourself right with God, focus on Him, and draw closer to Him.

The fix for every human being on this planet is the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16). If you are under the wrath of God, you can change that today. All you must do is repent (turn from your sin) and trust in Jesus Christ (turn to Him for forgiveness and salvation). If you are a member of the human race, you are just like everyone else — a sinner who needs Jesus Christ as Savior. You cannot afford to trust in yourself or in anything else to escape the wrath of God. God is angry at sin, there will be a payday someday, but Jesus has already provided the way out. You just need to accept it, trust in Him, and continue to trust in Him. This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!