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THE LOOKOUT

JANUARY 2022

Unit: ROMANS (Part 1)

Theme: RIGHTEOUS

Overview: Romans has been responsible for more church revivals than any other New Testament book. It is proper to spend three months studying it under three separate themes. The first theme has to do with being righteous. Students will learn that God is righteous, and therefore judgment should be left in his hands. Students will learn that Abraham was a good example of being righteous, as was the remnant of Israel. Finally, students will learn what righteous living looks like in daily life.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF JANUARY 2, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Recognize the rightness
of God's wrath, and rejoice
that he is a God of grace.**

UNIT: Romans (Part 1)

THEME: Righteous

LESSON TEXT: Romans 1:18-32

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Romans 3:10, 23; 6:23; 1 John 3:4;
Revelation 6:16-17

RIGHTEOUS WRATH

BY MARK SCOTT

Much wrath is unjustified. After David's son Amnon raped his sister Tamar, he hated her with an unjustified hatred more than the selfish love he had had for her (2 Samuel 13:15). However, God's wrath (yes, he does have wrath—not the type that just blows up but the kind that is settled and measured) is always justified. God cannot be prejudiced.

Paul began the journey to good news (Romans 3:21–5:21) by first giving the bad news (Romans 1:18–3:20). Jews and Gentiles (at great tension in the Epistle of Romans) stand guilty before God due to offending his righteousness. The theme of Romans is in 1:16-17. The gospel is powerful for everyone because God's rightness is made known in it. The journey toward God's rightness begins on the dark side.

Wrath Revealed

Romans 1:18-20

The love of God can only be appreciated by setting it against the wrath of God (sort of like setting a diamond on a black cloth). God's wrath will one day be revealed in full fury (Revelation 19:15). But for now he has hard-wired it into the universe. When people (primarily Gentiles here, it seems) *suppress* (hold down or squash) God's truth, his wrath is released—in a variety of ways—*against all the godlessness* (impiety or lack of reverence) and *wickedness* (things that are unjust or out of harmony).

People cannot blame God for revealing his wrath. After all, they have known better than to push back against it. God not only built his wrath into the universe, but he also built his nature into it. Those who have eyes to see cannot help but observe God's *invisible qualities*. They will see his *power and divine nature* ("Godness"). Since creation, and in creation, God *has been made known* (poem is the derived English word here; it occurs only here and in Ephesians 2:10). Therefore no one can claim that God is unjust in revealing his wrath.

Glory Exchanged

Romans 1:21-23

Paul furthered his argument about God's righteous wrath with a compositional pattern known as "substantiation" (from Walter Liefeld's book, *New Testament Exposition*). Consider how many of the verses or sentences in this text

begin with some form of the word *for*. Paul gave reasons for (substantiated) why God's righteous wrath is proper.

God's wrath is proper because people who *knew God* did not act like it. They did not give him his proper "glory" (i.e., properly ascribe him his praise and place) *nor gave thanks* (a phrase that transliterates the English word *eucharist*). The lack of giving thanks actually is a mark of a reprobate. When people do not glorify God or give thanks to God, they will continue on a downward spiral in mind and heart. They ultimately will become idolatrous (later described as "served created things rather than the Creator," v. 25). In short, God gets exchanged for idols. But in worshipping *birds and animals and reptiles*, these people are just worshipping themselves (cf. Isaiah 44:9-20). *Glory* is an interesting word to trace through Romans. Glory can be exchanged and missed (1:23; 3:23); it can be sought (2:7); it can be experienced (6:4); it can be offered (11:36; 16:27); and it will be revealed (8:18).

Bodies Degraded

Romans 1:24-32

When people take their focus off of God, there is only one logical place for it to go—to themselves. People look inward instead of looking up to God. This creates all kinds of problems (cf. James 1:14-15). God ultimately gives them over to the things that will destroy them. God does not give up on them, but he loves them too much to force them into a heaven they do not desire. God hands them over to do "their own thing," which of course is total chaos. It is hell, which Tom Ewald of Lincoln Christian University said "is truth known too late."

Desires (lusts) are unrestrained and give way to *sexual impurity* (lewdness) and *degrading of* (to treat with dishonor) *their bodies*. This is one of the six biblical passages on the practice of homosexuality. Some dismiss it by allowing the historical background to become the exegetical foreground. Any perversion can locate itself in some historical circumstance (see Suetonius's *The Twelve Caesars*). But if the text is read on its own terms, we find that any sexual intimacy outside that between a man and woman in the covenant of marriage will experience *the due penalty for its error*. Paul went on to cite 21 vices that stem from this *depraved mind* (vv. 29-30). To push back against God's *righteous decree* will result in death (and to affirm those who practice such is even worse), but nothing in this convicting text is beyond God's grace. ■

APPLICATION

SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF AN ‘UNANGRY GOD’

BY DAVID FAUST

American preacher Jonathan Edwards delivered a famous message in 1741 called “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” Don’t expect to hear a sermon like that anytime soon from a pulpit near you. Today, people prefer “an Unangry God”—an easygoing deity who makes no demands—a benign Grandpa in the Sky who judges no one and keeps smiling no matter what. Unangry God is a jolly Santa-like figure who treats every day like Christmas morning and always gives us what we want.

The trouble is, that’s not the God described in Scripture. In the Bible, wrath is a real attribute of God. Thankfully, it’s not his only quality or his dominant characteristic. And no, I’m not suggesting a steady diet of hellfire-and-brimstone sermons. But the truth is, if God had no capacity for righteous anger, it would create some difficult dilemmas.

An Unangry God creates a justice problem. The prophet speaks for many of us when he asks God, “Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?” (Habakkuk 1:3). The martyred saints wonder, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” (Revelation 6:10). How can the “holy and true” Lord ignore evil and wave off injustice with a dismissive shrug?

An Unangry God creates a psychological dilemma. Anger is a natural response to wrongdoing. If someone hacked into your bank account and stole your life savings, how would you feel? Our revulsion toward evil and injustice reflects the fact that we are created in the image of God. If child abuse and Taliban brutality stir our emotions, why wouldn’t they move the heart of God?

An Unangry God presents a theological and biblical problem. If God has no wrath, why does the Bible say he does? Nahum 1:2; John 3:36; Romans 2:5; Ephesians 5:6; Revelation 14:10; and other verses

speak plainly about this. Jesus never sinned, but he expressed righteous indignation.

Romans 1 reveals God’s displeasure toward sinful behaviors that our current culture asks us to tolerate and even celebrate, including homosexual acts. But if the only sin you notice is the homosexual kind, I challenge you to read this chapter again. God’s judgment falls on “every kind of wickedness” (v. 29). The catalog of evil in Romans 1 includes idolatry—serving created things instead of the Creator. And truth-twisting—replacing God’s wisdom with human opinions. The list includes all-too-familiar transgressions like greed, envy, gossip, slander, arrogance, boastfulness, and disobedience toward parents. On the list of offenders are those who “invent ways of doing evil” (v. 30)—like taking information technology with all its positive potential and misusing it to spread lies and disseminate pornography. Who deserves God’s wrath? Those who show “no fidelity, no love, no mercy” (v. 31).

Romans 1 debunks the myth of the Unangry God. God is holy, and sin deserves punishment. But we all sin, so is there any hope? That’s what the rest of Romans is about. Our holy God cannot tolerate sin, but as a loving, merciful Father he doesn’t want to treat us as our sins deserve. The solution? He sent Jesus to save us “from the coming wrath” (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

We shouldn’t deny God’s wrath, but we should appreciate his grace and say, as Jesus did, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

Personal Challenge: Discuss God’s righteous anger with a trusted friend or with your small group. Since “God is love” (1 John 4:16), how can he also be a God of wrath? How does his anger toward sin fit with his love for sinners? As an added challenge, write a worship prayer that praises God for both his holy anger and his amazing grace. **L**

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. Where did you find hope last week?
2. During the past week, in what way were you able to tell someone about the eternal hope you have because Jesus died on the cross for you?

Ask two people to read aloud **Romans 1:18-32** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to restate the passage in their own words in a minute or less.

3. What is your initial reaction to this passage
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - What is being revealed and made plain/clear to people?
 - What is the effect of this realization?
 - Four times in this passage, the apostle Paul discussed the fact that the people knew God (knowledge) and the truth about him (vv. 21, 25, 28, 32). How do these "refrains" help us understand the purpose for this section?
 - Why is it important for Christ followers to glorify God and give him thanks?
 - Three times this passage says "God gave them over" to sinful behaviors (vv. 24, 26, 28). This means, says Warren W. Wiersbe in *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, "that He permitted them to go on in their sins and reap the sad consequences." (God always gives us free choices, regardless of the outcomes.) What are some of the sad consequences of our bad choices?
 - How does the anger of a holy, just God fit in with his love for the world?
 - Let's ask that from a slightly different viewpoint. Recognizing that God's love prompted him to send Jesus to the world to save us from our sins, how does God's love and mercy work alongside his justice and wrath?
5. What do you learn about God as both a God of love and justice from this passage?
6. What do you learn about humans?
7. What do you learn about obeying God versus disobeying him (and their repercussions)?
8. How would you include God's holiness and justice when you share the Good News with someone?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. In what area of your life do you need God's unconditional and saving love this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Romans 2:1-16** as we study the book of Romans and the topic, "Righteous." You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■