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Romans 1:18-32

First John 4:8 tells us that “*God is love*”. And He is. An intense love that is beyond anything we are capable of having or even understanding. His love is so great that He created us, knowing full well what we were going to do. He knew we would rebel against Him and do our best to deny the very existence of our Creator. Before He created us He knew what God the Son would have to do: that He would have to become one of us and suffer and die, and experience the awful punishment that our sins deserve. And that only to save those who would accept the work Jesus did for us.

As fallen human-beings, our tendency is to twist this precious love of God into something ugly; into something that suits our own rebellious nature and our natural dislike for God. We take the phrase “*God is love*” and tear it from the rest of the Bible. Then we redefine love as something that gives us license to do whatever we want to do.

When we take the Bible together, as we ought to do, we find that this wondrous love that defines God is only one of His many characteristics. And contrary to our definition of a mushy, lenient love; God’s love is holy and righteous and leaves plenty of room for wrath and judgement.

Judgement is God’s prerogative. He is the creator of all things so He gets to make the rules. But God doesn’t just make arbitrary rules. All of His commands come from His holy and just character; all of His statutes come from ultimate truth; all of what He has for us to do comes from that intense love He has for us and desire for our good. Unfortunately, because of sin, we instinctively rebel against what God wants us to do, even to our own detriment.

Wrath is God’s righteous reaction to sin and evil. Wrath is what God’s unchanging character demands when confronted with sin. Yes, God is love; but God is also holy; and He will not let sin go unpunished. His holy character, His very being, requires justice. If He did not act justly, He would no longer be who He is.

We tend think of wrath as being anger, and anger is involved, but God’s wrath is different from man’s. Man’s wrath tends to be a fit of rage with some loss of control. Man’s wrath tends toward vengeance being an emotional reaction to what has been done or said. God’s wrath is under perfect control and the wrathful actions He takes are entirely appropriate for whatever evil has been done.

Because God’s wrath is under His perfect control, He doesn’t have to act on it immediately. This is due to His mercy. He temporarily withholds His righteous wrath in order to give people time to turn to Him through Jesus Christ. If they do, then that wrath is poured out on Jesus and the Christian is saved from suffering it. If the person does not turn to Christ, then they will receive God’s stored up wrath. Not a pleasant thought.

Judgement from God can be either for good or bad. Christians will be judged on their righteous acts to determine their rewards in heaven. Non-believers will receive judgement against them for rejecting Christ. These will then face the wrath of God. Wrath is something all believers will be spared from by the grace of God. His love for us is demonstrated in Jesus receiving the wrath we deserve in our place. There will be a final judgement and outpouring of wrath at some point in the future; but both of these exist in the world now in accordance with God’s purposes.

In our verses today from Romans, Paul is writing about the activities of the Pagans and what they face for their rejection of God. Now certainly, the Jews would have enjoyed reading this, but starting in chapter 2, Paul lets them have it and lets them know that they are also desperately in need of a Saviour.

Paul begins in verse 18 with a statement regarding the wrath of God being revealed from heaven. As we continue to read and get to the verses describing the deep evil of homosexuality, the Genesis account of Sodom and Gomorrah comes to mind. The cities of the valley had so turned against God that He gave them over to total depravity. Once God judged them beyond excuse, fire and brimstone rained down on them from heaven; resulting in complete destruction.

As Paul tells us later in this letter in chapter 15 verse 4, “*For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction”*. The account of Sodom is included in the Bible for our instruction. It lets us know that God will let things go on for only so long, and then He will perform judgement and He will pour out His wrath on the ungodly.

Here in Romans, Paul is explaining the process to us. There is a common grace that God gives to people so they do not act as wickedly as they possibly can. But if they resist God and continue to defy Him, there will come a point where He will remove the restraint of common grace and let them go where their lusts lead them.

While Paul focuses on homosexuality here, people can be released to any lust they have. It can be any form of sexual perversion. It can be greed for money or for power. It can be murder. It can be living in any of the sinful lifestyles that Paul lists in this section. But notice that the root cause of all these things is idolatry. All of these sins can themselves become idols; and with all of them, the ultimate idol is the self. When a person puts themselves in the place of God, a life steeped in sin is the result. And God will allow it if we resist Him long enough.

Notice, too, how these things can and do take place at a level above the individual. With Sodom, the whole city rejected God and so God turned them over collectively to homosexuality. Then the entire city faced judgement and wrath. Over and again, the nation of Israel turned against God to idols, and God would bring judgement upon them in the form of them being conquered by other nations or by natural disasters.

Often times we think of judgement from God being in the form of natural disasters. And that is true; God is rendering judgement that nations are doing wrong and in His mercy, He is trying to get their attention so they turn to Him. It’s not hard to see this in the United States. As this country turns collectively from God, natural disasters are increasing.

Now, these can certainly be reckoned as some of the birth pains that are spoken of in the book of Revelation. God has let us know that these things will become more frequent as the Day of the Lord draws closer. But that is also because the world is turning more away from God and He needs to bring about more judgement.

But we must be careful that we don’t focus entirely on the natural disasters and miss something else that is very important. What we read about here in Romans is judgement. God allowing people to turn fully to degrading passions. As we can see in the news, this country is under judgement.

Homosexuality and transgenderism are blatant attacks on God’s design in creation. They are obnoxious acts by human-beings that they are their own gods who can create themselves in whatever image they choose. That we have come under judgement is evidenced by the laws that have been created in this land holding these things to be acceptable. We can also see this in how far society has moved in the direction of each person having their own legitimate truth, instead of the absolute truth of God.

Now, we as Christians face a danger here. We face the same danger the Jews did in Paul’s day of sitting smug and righteous while looking out at the ungodly Pagans. This brings me to 1 Peter 4:17. *For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God.* Then the verse goes on to say, “*and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*” In case you hadn’t noticed, the church is under judgement also.

God’s judgement has several uses and results. As we’ve already mentioned, His judgement is to determine reward and punishment. But it is also to train and purge. Training and purging are the judgements we see taking place in the church of Jesus in the world today.

Individually and corporately, people and whole denominations are making their choices; they either stick with the Bible as the infallible word of God, or they turn to their own futile understanding. This is the judgement of purging that is taking place. It is taking place to separate the wheat from the tares. God is separating those who do not follow His holy commandments from those who are truly His church.

Those who claim to be Christian but do not follow the Bible and Jesus Christ as the one and only Saviour, are those who live in unrighteousness and lawlessness. And we can see the judgement upon them: They have been turned over to depravity. They not only accept those who practice abomination, but heartily approve of what they do.

We don’t like to see church denominations split; we don’t like to see the disunity in Christendom. But it is God at work, cleansing Jesus’ bride, so that she will be perfect and without defect when presented to Him in heaven. We pray for the people who have turned from the Bible, hoping that the judgement will turn them back to God; but we also praise God for cleansing His church.

I must here point out one of the particular problems in the church bodies that leave the true faith. In these groups you have some who stand fast on the word of God. You have others who fight to go the way of the world. But the majority are in the middle. They are the moderates. They want to go to church on Sunday and live peaceably; they don’t want waves. They refuse to take a stand.

The book of Revelation has a warning for these people. It’s in chapter 3 verses 15 and 16. Jesus Himself tells the church of Laodicea: *I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.* Don’t be lukewarm; make the commitment to stand firm with Christ. Those who don’t stand with Jesus are against Him.

The other purpose of judgement on the church is to purify. The Bible refers to the purification of Christians as being like the purifying of gold or silver. Purification of precious metals takes a lot of heat; it takes fire. Christians are far more precious to Jesus than gold or silver; and He will purify us. The picture of purification by fire is unpleasant, but that’s what it means.

In 1 Peter 4:12, he says, “*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you*.” Jesus promises us persecution; the apostles explain that it is for our purification. The need for us to be purified shows that we have sin in our lives. We have tendencies that go against God and our Saviour, Jesus. So, this is our judgement; that we belong to Christ so He is going to prepare us to be perfect for Him. This is a comfort to us. We know that every bad thing that happens to us in our life is something God has allowed for our good. And He knows exactly what He is doing.

This overall judgement works together for God’s purposes. For example, this nation passes laws; and while under judgement, there are some bad ones. Sometimes, Christians can easily deal with them. Abortion is legal. But a Christian can avoid the problem by simply not having an abortion. But now there are laws regarding homosexuality and transgenderism that it is easy for a Christian to fall foul of. To go against the law can have repercussions. In this instance, members of Christ’s church are facing a fiery ordeal.

Now, this particular congregation is a Bible believing Jesus following group. The main judgement we will deal with is the judgement of purification. We are committed to following Jesus but we aren’t perfect. We need to maintain this; we need to stick with God’s word; but satan is tricky so there is a warning in Revelation for us too.

Jesus speaks to the church congregation at Ephesus. He commends them for being careful to avoid heresy and to tolerate persecution. Then Jesus says this, “*But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*” They left their love of Jesus and Jesus said the two greatest commandments were to love God with all your heart and to love your neighbor. They had become strict and ridged; we might say “legalistic”.

I’m not saying we are like this here; we are not, this is a loving church. But this is a common misstep for a church that clings fiercely to God’s word. People who are caught in the grip of abomination and sin need love and acceptance. The person needs it, not the sin. We can love a person without loving their sin, in the hopes that they will come to Christ in repentance and receive salvation.

All this is too much for us, which is why the Lord has graciously bestowed the Holy Spirit upon us. He helps us through these thorny issues and protects us in the flames. Our Lord is good and powerful, He is able to rescue the godly from temptation; He is able to keep us safe in this fallen world; He is able to deliver us from evil.

Prayer

Almighty God, how grateful we are that Your arm is not too short to save us from trouble; that no one is able to snatch us from Your hand. We are safe in You through Jesus Christ. It is by Christ alone we come to You, for there is no other way to salvation. We have all fallen into captivity by sin; but You have rescued us and granted us true freedom in Jesus.

We are in awe of You Lord, as we watch you separate the wheat from the chaff. You gather the faithful from the world; You purge Your bride the church of those not dressed in wedding clothes; You cleanse Your church so that she will be spotless before You in eternity.

Now help us, we pray You, to be faithful to Jesus; To hold fast to Your word in the Bible; To follow Your commands to love You and to love our neighbor. Give us the compassion that You have for the lost and put the Gospel forefront in our minds and hearts so that we might be eager to share it with this dying world.

We thank You and praise You in Jesus’ name

Amen