

Romans Overview

Wrath

- Paul starts with a dark backdrop, without which it's hard to see the full beauty of the diamond being shown in front of it. He says all of us failed to live righteously, whether religious or irreligious, and that places us under the righteous wrath of God. Whether you think you of all people are in right standing or that you don't need to care about your standing—Paul addresses both and lays all of us bare and in need to be saved from the wrath of God that is being revealed against ALL mankind.
 - 1) God revealed Himself.
 - 2) We suppressed Him & exchanged Him for ourselves.
 - 3) So God gave us over to ourselves.
- Suppression: We don't just believe based on knowledge; we believe based on what we love.
 - *"The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, 10 and with all wicked **deception** for those who are perishing, **because they refused to love the truth** and so be saved. 11 **Therefore** God sends them a strong **delusion**, so that they may believe what is false, 12 in order that all may be condemned **who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.**"*
 - They bought into lies because they hated the truth. They did not believe God because they had pleasure in unrighteousness. This is the picture of suppression we should carry into Romans. It's the same pattern of suppression and exchanging.

¹⁸ **For** the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ **For** what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ **For** his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 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. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and **exchanged** the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. ²⁴ **Therefore** God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they **exchanged** the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. ²⁶ **For this reason** God gave them up to dishonorable passions. **For** their women **exchanged** natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ **And since** they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

- This is why there is wrath. Paul is saying that the ultimate injustice, the most heinous crime in the universe is that we suppress God—we worship ourselves rather than Him, we twist truth and choose lies instead: that the world is about us, that all of this is here for us, that we are the peak of glory. That is THE injustice for which God would be just to pour out His wrath. We go through life in a way that is all about us because we've suppressed and rejected that it's all about Him.
- Paul uses chapter 2 to turn the lens on those who presume they are not like *those people*. It is not just the irreligious who put their fist up at God by turning their focus away from Him but also the religious who wrongly look to themselves and bank on God's kindness.

*2:1 In passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. 3 Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you **presume** on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that*

God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? 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.

- So what does he mean that we presume on God's kindness? It means we wrongly assume that because God is love that we are not in danger of His wrath. But Paul charges that "all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin."
- Do not let God's kindness undermine our need to repent. When you don't see wrath and only kindness, you lose repentance. But when you see that righteous wrath and fall on your face in repentance, you actually begin to see the riches of His kindness. When we are angry that God would be so harsh, it's because we don't see His kindness and patience in that He has not fully revealed His wrath. He is being patient so that you would not taste more wrath but that you would taste kindness. A kindness that now has an indescribable flavor of mercy because you know what you deserved but got grace.
- If we don't see that something is wrong around us or we can't move past "Does this work?", we will not be bold like Paul in our witness to others that "This saves!"

Summary/Transition: Let God's wrath on unrighteousness drive you in desperation and thanksgiving for the righteousness that God has provided through the Gospel! It's not just His wrath being revealed to mankind; there is an even greater revelation. There is a righteousness now being revealed through the gospel. Man exchanged God's glory for his own, so God gave man over to more unrighteousness. But now God has given Himself over for us as unrighteous so that we can become righteous.

Righteousness

Paul details the reality and implications of a Gospel of grace and a righteousness that comes by faith because we so easily stumble over grace and manipulate it into something we don't really need or something that in actuality we earned by some measure of our own worth. So while we're not the direct audience of Jews and Gentiles that Paul is writing to, you'll find that we share the same inclinations of the heart that cause us to abuse and refuse the Gospel in the same ways.

An overemphasis on our righteousness can diminish our need for Christ's righteousness.

1. We **deserve** the Gospel.
 2. We **don't need** the Gospel.
- The law told the Jews they needed a Messiah, and now that Messiah is supposedly telling them they don't need the law? You can see why there's an issue there in the Jew's mind. They know, as verse 5 says, "Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them." This is what they believed. They keep and uphold the law—it's a righteousness that is based on the law—and yet Paul is saying that he is praying for them that they would be saved by a righteousness that is apart from the law?
 - Paul quotes Deuteronomy and shows how Christ fits in this picture. And in 9:30-31 you can concisely see the issue, which is then answered in verse 32.

³⁰ What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. ³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but **as if** it were based on works.

- Paul's saying that Christ is not contradicting the law. The reason the Jews are stumbling over the righteousness that comes from Christ is because they have already stumbled over the righteousness that's

revealed through the law. They have misconstrued the law and therefore misunderstand and reject Christ. The “as if” in verse 32 is the reason they are “ignorant of the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own.” They used the law as if by their works they could become righteous. The righteousness that the law reveals was supposed to be pursued by faith and not by works. So Christ is not proclaiming a new way of righteousness. It’s always been faith.

An overemphasis on Christ’s righteousness can diminish the goal of our righteousness.

3. We **did** the Gospel (imputed righteousness is the extent of Christ’s work in my life).
4. We **divide** the Gospel (separating salvation from sanctification).
 - The bookends of Romans help us rightly picture what the Gospel is doing in the world. It is proclaiming a righteousness that is not your own, but it is also producing a church that *is* righteous. This salvation isn’t just fire protection so I can go on living my life all the same without the danger of facing wrath. His imputed righteousness is precisely what empowers us to live righteously. God is not desiring a church that is technically counted righteous by faith but is characteristically unrighteous in their lives.
 - This is why it is not out of place for the gospel to be concerned with your righteousness. It is not asking you to earn your standing before God, but to live out the standing that Christ has earned for you and has been reckoned yours by faith. Forgiveness is the beginning, not the end, of the Christian life. He has died for us so that we might live with Him. It is a contradiction to say that I am being saved but not being sanctified. The faith by which we are being saved is the faith by which we are being sanctified.

Transition: Paul actually explains this purpose of the Gospel in terms of an aroma. And you can picture it this way: The gospel is not just something that removes God’s frown on our lives and leaves Him with a neutral face towards us, but the gospel is transforming you through Christ’s righteousness so that God smiles as He sees righteousness being worked out through your life.

Aroma

- The bookends: 1:5 “Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to **bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.**”
15:26 Now to him who is able to **strengthen** you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ... [this gospel has been revealed] to all nations... **to bring about the obedience of faith.**”
- The gospel is something that strengthens you to do what? It says it’s strengthening you to actually obey by faith, to not just be counted righteous by faith but to live righteously by faith. This makes more sense when we see Paul’s role of spreading the Gospel described in priestly terms. He says, “The grace of God has been given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the Gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”
 - The OT imagery is of continual sacrificial offerings that create a “pleasing aroma to God.”
 - So Paul is doing something striking when he refers to his missionary work in terms of priestly work. He’s connecting the image of these sacrifices, and drawing a line from a passage like Exodus 29 to Hebrews 13.

“A pleasing aroma.... It shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there.” (Ex. 29:41-21)

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.” (Heb. 13:15)

- Rather than animals being offered continually in the temple, our lives are being offered as a continual sacrifice to God. And that aroma which rises up to please God is now something that Paul says, by the power of the Gospel, can be rising up from your life to make God smile.
- So when we say that God's glory is the foundation of everything we do, I think this picture of an aroma actually helps us more accurately see God's glory as the end of everything we do—that everything we do would rise up to Him and make Him smile. There is no higher "so that".
- A Christian's "so that" goes highest—it points and peaks at the glory of God. Apart from the Gospel, we cannot free ourselves from our own little peak. So while many things may look the same at the bottom in terms of societal norms (i.e., we all work to provide for ourselves and our families; we exercise to better ourselves; we volunteer to help people), there is a higher peak—the glory and the smile of God.
- It is not at odds for God to both be pleased in providing us with a righteousness that is not our own while also being pleased to create in us a real righteousness. The connection is that it is specifically His providing you of Christ's righteousness that you have the power to live righteously. By seeing God's smile on our lives through the work of Christ, we now have a new orientation for all of our works to not be about ourselves but about the smile of God. It's only by resting in the work of Christ that we can strive in a way that all points to God.
 - **Individually:** This is what Paul aims for on an individual level in chapter 12. "I beseech **you** by the mercies of God to present your bodies a pleasing sacrifice to God." It's a distinct way of living righteously that is based on mercy. God by His mercy has paid for our unrighteousness, allowing us, uniquely as Christians, to strive for righteousness without the compulsion that we're earning it. Without that freedom, we lack the power to live righteously; it'll always be about us and it can't all point to God.
 - **Collectively:** The Gospel is ultimately God's plan for creating a righteous people who bring Him glory. As we present our bodies by the power of the Gospel as an acceptable sacrifice to God, we are taking part in God's plan to use the gospel to "bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among the nations." The gospel is causing a pleasing aroma from every nation to rise up to God, and we get to play a part in that, both as we present our bodies and as we help present others by the power of the Gospel.