

Romans 1 (18-20) – The Depths of God

The first verse in the Bible, Genesis 1:1, says that in the beginning, God created. And in this creation, there is a lot of beauty, and a lot of intricacy and obvious design. It is awe inspiring and wonderful. But there is also a lot of chaos, seeming randomness, decay, disaster, disease, and destruction in it too. And our world is full of evil and injustice. Is this also God's design?

If God created, and if God is all powerful, does that mean he created evil, injustice, pain, and suffering? Or doesn't that mean he at least allows all of that trouble? Is he powerless to stop it? Or does God even care about it? If God is all powerful, then why does he even allow evil? Is God not all powerful? Or is God not actually good?

Well, you could trace it all the way back through history until you come to Adam and Eve. You see, God created a good world. And the first people had it perfect, and they knew God. But they listened to Satan, and disobeyed God, and sin entered the world. That's where all this trouble comes from.

But why did God punish the whole human race, and the whole universe, because of Adam and Eve? And why did God allow Satan to deceive Adam and Eve? Since God knew what was going to happen, why didn't he just destroy Satan? Why was Satan even in the garden? And why was Satan even created? And if God knew that Adam and Eve were going to eat of that forbidden tree, why was the tree even there? Why did it even exist? Why did God create a world where he knew such evil, injustice, and suffering would exist? Is God not all powerful? Or is God not actually good?

We cannot fully answer these questions on this side of eternity. But it's good to wrestle with these questions, because as you do, you can learn to love God more deeply. You need to get rooted in the depths of God. If you don't, you might wind up like those that Jesus says *have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away* (Mark 4:17).

Our text, Romans 1:18-20, says that God made creation to display himself – to show his invisible, eternal power and divine nature by what he has made. Psalm 19:1 says – *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.* By the beauty of creation, we know that the Creator is beautiful and loves beauty. By the intricacy of creation, we know the Creator is inventive and loves imagination. By the size of creation, we know the Creator is vast and loves to spread his glory.

We also learn of God by how he relates to what he has created. Romans 1:18 declares that God has revealed his wrath against the rebels by their own refusal of the truth. You might have heard people say, “Why doesn’t God just reveal himself in a way that couldn’t be mistaken?” “If he did that, everyone would believe”. Well that simply isn’t true.

Consider the fallen angels. They knew exactly who God was. They weren’t ignorant. They knew what they were doing. But they still chose to rebel. The Devil was one of those angels, the leader of them. Satan, the Devil, was created by God as a good angel. But he chose to lead a rebellion against God. In a very real sense, Satan and the demons created themselves. And God drove them all from heaven down to earth, and he destined them for ultimate damnation. Hell was made for the Devil and his angels.

God’s response to the fallen angels teaches us that God is holy. We learn that he expects perfect obedience, and that disobeying him brings judgment. We learn that he has the power to execute those judgments. In a universe without sin, you would not know such terrifying depths of the Creator. Get the picture: God is holy, he expects obedience, and he judges disobedience. He has all power, and he will display his wrath and terror.

So, why then would God give us another episode of rebellion in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve? Don’t we already know this picture?

No, not quite. God was revealing something different this time. With this episode, this big picture, we learn that God is not only a God of wrath and

terror, but also mercy, kindness, redemption, and love. After the sin of our representative parents, God seeks them out, promises them (and the universe) a savior, and covers their shame (Genesis 3:9, 15, 21).

You see, the punishment of God was merciful and his loving-kindness immense. Here was this cosmic treason, and through the sin of one man, Adam, all of mankind and the entire universe would be plunged into the depths of darkness. But through the righteousness of one man, Jesus, God would rescue mankind from the depths of darkness and give them eternal light and life, and the universe along with it.

And now we learn that God extends his loving-kindness to the completely undeserving. His aim is reconciliation, redemption, and restoration. He longs to redeem the guilty and declare them guiltless. Through the gospel story we see that the promise made to Adam and Eve of redemption comes to fruition. God has sent a Redeemer, his Son, Jesus. And we learn that he is willing to sacrifice his only Son to make our redemption possible.

This world is full of people who have rebelled against God. That includes you, and me, and all of us, anyone, everyone, and everywhere. But God's grace reaches down as far as your disobedience and then goes beyond it. You aren't able to "out-sin" his redemption. And all of the sin and its effects on people and in the world cannot stop his redemptive plan. All the chaos in the universe won't ultimately change the fact that he is redeeming the cosmos itself. The whole universe will be saved by King Jesus.

God wants you to know the full glory of this. If sin and evil didn't exist, we wouldn't know the depths of God's loving grace and kindness. God showed that no matter how bad it might get, his goodness is greater than that, and he can redeem anyone, everyone, and everything. The question isn't, "Is God good?" The question is, "Will you trust that he is good?"

What is your alternative? Is it a universe with no real purpose, and no real justice, but just randomness, and eternal chaos, and injustice? Or maybe you

think of a god who doesn't show any of his righteous anger and wrath against evil. But a god that doesn't punish evil isn't good, or loving. People want a god that suits them, but that isn't who he really is.

The God of the Bible created with a purpose. And this story is his story, and it is going according to his plan, and it isn't finished yet. In the unfolding panorama of this eternal drama, in your personal world, God invites you to know him intimately, and personally. In a universe where evil didn't exist, vast parts of our Creator – the greatest and most beautiful being or thing in the universe – greater than the universe itself – these parts of God would be completely unknown by us. But God wants you to know him. Deeply.

Why did God allow, sin, evil, injustice, and suffering into the world in the first place? Not simply to show his righteous anger and terrible wrath. God allowed the depths of our evil in order to show the depths of his love. You won't understand how far Jesus went and how far he will go to rescue you until you see how far he had to travel. Evil, sin, and suffering create an invitation to fathom the depths of God and his love. Start there, and then you can begin to ask how this relates to your personal situation.

In this world, against the backdrop of sin, evil, and injustice, God is actually showing you just how good and loving he really is, by overcoming the bad no matter how bad it is. It's been said this way: God allows what he hates in order to accomplish what he loves. God hates sin. God loves redemption. God loves you. And on the cross, Jesus proved all of that. That's God's story. He is all powerful. And he is actually good. In a way that only he can be.

You are part of God's story. Which side of the story do you want to wind up on? The side where it ends up in perfect love, joy, and peace? Or the other side, where you wind up in the same place as Satan and the demons? In God's story, in this life, you have to go through the bad. But will you trust in God's good? Will you trust Jesus Christ and accept his sacrifice on the cross to pay for your rebellion against God? That's what determines which side of the story you finally wind up on.