**Text**: Romans 1:18-19

**Title:** The Wrath of God

**Truth**: God’s wrath is revealed against sin and sinners.

**Date/Location**: Sunday Morning February 3, 2013 at FBC

Introduction

A very unpleasant title indeed! But in our journey through the Bible together, it is one that we must consider carefully.

I. The Character of God’s Wrath

A. The wrath of God *is not* an attribute of God. That is, we cannot say “God *is* wrath” like we say “God *is* love” or “God *is* light.”

B. The wrath of God *is not* an outburst of uncontrolled anger, as we might think in a human context. There is no sin mixed into God’s wrath as there often is in ours.

C. The wrath of God *is* His displeasure against sin that arises out of His holiness. He is too pure to even stand looking at evil (Habakkuk 1:13). Sin is repulsive to God and He cannot be party to it or condone it in any way. His moral constitution is such that letting evil go on forever, without consequence, is an impossibility for Him. Sin is more than an irritation or agitation to God; it is not just a pet peeve for Him. Literally He hates sin (for instance, Deut. 12:31 and 16:22 show that God hates the sin of idolatry).

II. The Expressions of God’s Wrath in General

A. Specific Acts in History

1. The curse and expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

2. The global Flood recorded in Genesis 6-9.

3. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

4. The destruction of Egypt during the Exodus

5. The wilderness wanderings of the nation of Israel after their unbelief.

6. The deportation of the northern kingdom as well as the southern kingdom in Israel’s history.

2 Peter 2:4-9 mentions a couple of these occurrences.

B. Events in the Future

1. The Tribulation judgments on the earth (Revelation 6-19).

2. The Lake of Fire punishment for the devil, his angels, and all unbelieving human beings (Revelation 20; Matthew 25:41).

3. The destruction of the old earth and creation of the new (Revelation 21-22).

C. Present Day Expressions

1. Specific disasters, though we cannot infallibly explain them.

2. The natural consequences of sin, be it a disease, a shortened life, economic hardship, guilt, and many other such things.

3. God’s abandoning or “giving over” people to their sin and the full unmitigated expression of it in their lives. The removal of divine restraint permits sinners to carry on to awful extremes. This itself is an expression of God’s wrath. We are there today in many ways.

D. With all these expressions of God’s wrath, should it be any wonder that Paul says that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men?

III. The Timing of God’s Wrath in this Passage

A. First let’s go back and look at verse 17 for a moment. My explanation of the timing of the revelation in 1:17 was not very clear in the last set of notes. That is to say, when is the revelation of the righteousness of God made in the gospel? In the previous notes, I pointed our attention back to the fact that the work of Christ disclosed a way to be right with God. That would seem to indicate that the righteousness of God was revealed in the past. And that is true. But the present tense of "reveal" is used here, indicating an ongoing revelation. Such disclosure did indeed start at the cross, but it did not end there. Every time the gospel is proclaimed, it discloses the righteousness of God.

B. In verse 18, the same word "revealed" is used, also in the present tense. This means that God's wrath is being revealed right now. That means "right now" in the first century, and it is still ongoing "right now" in our present. Therefore, we are not looking for specific acts in history or events in the future, but rather present-day expressions of God’s wrath.

C. That disposition of God which is entirely against sin and brings His punishment upon humankind is being disclosed and made clear as we speak. Just how is that? The particular form of God's wrath is His "handing them over" wrath. We will see that phrase three times--in verse 24, 26, and 28. It means that God abandons them to the full, built-in consequences of their sin, including the commission of more and even deeper sin. That in effect drives them farther from God and deepens their condemnation before God.

IV. The Direction of God’s Wrath

A. Note that this wrath is revealed from heaven. The phrase "from heaven" basically means "from God." In the Bible, "heaven" is often used as a substitute or indirect word to refer to God. God is involved in the disclosure of His wrath. It is not a matter from which He is disconnected or disinterested.

B. Romans 1:18 says that God’s wrath is directed toward ungodliness and unrighteousness. God's wrath is revealed on, or toward, or upon, or against, all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. The "un-" words are similar, although we may make a distinction between bad character (ungodliness) and bad behavior (unrighteousness). The idea is pretty clear. God is not happy with evil.

C. This evil is done by men, and it is upon men that the wrath comes. We must be careful to recognize from other passages of the Bible is that God’s wrath is also directed at the people who do those things. 1:18 does not spell this out in detail, but we know it to be true from John 3:36, Psalm 5:4-6, 11:5, and Romans 2:2.

1. God’s wrath and condemnation ultimately come down on people, not just a separate abstraction of their deeds. We may think of sin as separate from the sinner in some theoretical way, but the two are so intertwined as to be inextricably linked together. Sin does not exist in a vacuum—it is always attached to personal beings, that is, people or demons.

2. This might seem objectionable to your mind—after all, God loves sinners, doesn’t he? We should note that in John 3:16-21, Jesus teaches us that He did not come into the world to condemn it, but to save it. In other words, His purpose in coming was to provide salvation. We could say that an ‘unfortunate’ side effect of His coming was to heighten the condemnation of those who reject Him, but that was not His deepest intent for coming.

V. The Context that God’s Wrath Provides for the Gospel

A. Another reason that it might seem objectionable to talk so much about sin and God’s wrath, which we will be doing a lot of in the upcoming weeks, is that it is unpleasant and not uplifting. It is certainly bad news. Paul is setting out, over the next two pages of his letter (1:18-3:20), to prove the sinfulness of mankind.

B. In order to have a balanced understanding of this subject, what we have to keep in mind is that everything exists in a context. The gospel exists in the context of the sinfulness of man and God’s response to that sin. What I mean by that is that the good news concerning Jesus Christ and His righteousness-providing work on the cross has to be understood against the backdrop of the ungodliness of mankind and God’s wrath against sin.

C. The gospel *cannot be rightly understood if mankind is good*. If people are basically good, the gospel would be unnecessary and superfluous. This is why the gospel in every age is seen by the unbelieving world, and even professing Christendom, as passé. Why? Because people misunderstand the nature of mankind, they think they have no need of rescue from sin and death. But God is telling us the foundational truth in Romans that we are in fact bad, not good!

D. The gospel *cannot be rightly understood if God has no wrath*. In other words, maybe we agree that mankind, and we personally, are sinners. But if God is just a heavenly pushover that doesn’t care about sin or doesn’t do anything about it, then we don’t need to be saved. God will take us, or we’ll be just fine on our own! But not so, according to what God has said.

VI. The Suppression of Truth the Cause for God’s Wrath

A. Mankind who is ungodly and unrighteous suppresses the truth. This means that by means of their evil, they hinder or restrain the truth in their lives.

1. The truth here is not "the gospel" per se. Truth refers to those things that may be known about God (v. 19) in a general way. It is called "general revelation." Suppression of the general knowledge of God leads to suppression of the specific knowledge of Christ in the gospel as well. Any sin has the effect of suppressing truth about God—whether general revelation, an attribute of God, a promise of God for judgment, or the gospel of God.

2. Illustrations in our day abound. If God's truth is displayed clearly, proponents of LGBT, abortion, and pornography would be rebuked and they don't want that. The media's over-sexualized portrayal of women at almost every turn is another way the truth is suppressed by means of unrighteousness. (Think about that for a minute during the commercials.) If God and his morality and displeasure against sin are displayed, it ruins the sinner’s fun.

B. The truth is near to mankind. If the truth were far away, then people could complain that they didn't know they were suppressing it. But the fact is that the truth is near—it was manifest *in* them, because God has made it clear to them. These words are significant because it says that God has made some things obvious and clear to all human beings.

C. A question arises as to how it is the case that the truth of God was manifest in them, but yet they held it down.

1. Was the knowledge of God clear in the beginning of human history but lost over time so that people today don’t have it?

2. Or is this what happens the individual's life, namely that they knew the truth about God at birth, and then suppressed it over time as they sinned more?

3. Could a person work back and regain that truth and thus please God?

D. I don't think those explanations are right. A better explanation is that unbelieving people *at one and the same time* know what God has clearly manifested to them, but they also suppress it and deceive themselves into “not knowing” it. It's a bit hard to explain, but I believe it will become clear to them at their day of judgment before God. They will have to honestly acknowledge to themselves that they knew what they were doing was not right. They will have to agree that they departed from God and there was no good reason for doing so, that God was God and God is powerful and that their consciences were given to keep them from sin and that they were deserving of death. Right now, unbelievers are doing a delicate balancing act of knowing in their "heart of hearts" basic things about God, yet holding those things back by their ungodly behavior.

Conclusion

To hear all of this should not be a big downer to those of us who are Christians, because Jesus Christ bore God's wrath when He took upon Himself the sin of the world. If we are in Christ, we are shielded from God's anger against sin forever!

Furthermore, Christians are delivered from the crazy self-deception that veils the minds of unbelievers. We acknowledge God’s wrath against sin and sinners such as ourselves; and we most gladly accept the knowledge of God in Christ. MAP