

What Is the Wrath of God

by Sinclair Ferguson

The sermon explores the biblical diagnosis of man's true plight, revealing that the ultimate reason man needs the gospel is the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

Duration: 55:54

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 3:16, Romans 1:16-18, Romans 3:23, Ephesians 2:8-9

Topics: "Wrath"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the passage in Romans 1:18 in order to grasp the glory of the gospel. The ultimate reason for man's need for the gospel is revealed in verse 18, which states that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. The speaker highlights that this concept may be difficult for some to accept, but it is a fact that God has revealed in Scripture. The only reliable source to learn about God and salvation is through the truth revealed in His word.

Transcript

That passage we read this morning together in Romans chapter one must surely be one of the grimmest passages in the whole Bible, and I don't suppose any normal person really enjoys reading verses like these. And yet it's a profoundly important passage if we are rightly to understand the glory of the gospel of which Paul has been speaking in these introductory verses 16 and 17 of Romans chapter one, and to grasp something of the marvel and wonder of what God has done for us in the gospel of Christ. In fact, a true understanding of what Paul is saying in this part of Romans one and through chapter two and in the first half of chapter three is really as important for a true grasp of the gospel as a true diagnosis is for a doctor.

You see, there are two prerequisites if a man who is very sick is going to be brought to health. One is that the doctor must make a thorough and accurate diagnosis. I can remember Dr. Lloyd Jones saying once when he was preaching in Glasgow that Lord Harger, to whom he was at one time a clinical assistant and who was one of the great physicians of his day, used to drum into his students in St. Bartholomew's Hospital a phrase that all of them learned off very quickly when they became his students, and it was this, the doctor who fails in diagnosis fails everywhere.

And that's the primary thing, a thorough and accurate diagnosis. But the second prerequisite is that the diagnosis must be accepted by the patient. Because, you see, there are people who will just refuse to

believe that such a serious thing could conceivably be wrong with them.

I have known several people like that. They may listen to everything that the doctor says, but deep down they just refuse to believe it. And so they live under the delusion that the treatment they need is perhaps less radical than he says.

Now the question which arises as we come to this passage this morning is what is the biblical diagnosis of man's true plight? What is it that lies behind the glory of this gospel of which Paul says he is not ashamed? Well, there are all sorts of answers that people would give to that question. Some might say with some truth, well, what puts me in need of a Savior, and particularly of such a Savior as Jesus, is that life is difficult and uncertain, and I need a guide and friend through life. And that's not a bad answer to give.

Others might say, I find a sense of need in my heart, an emptiness, a frustration, a restlessness, and I believe Christ could satisfy that. That, of course, is so true. Others might come nearer the heart of things and say, I need a Savior because of my sin.

I need pardon and cleansing and deliverance from its power. But you know none of these is the ultimate reason that man needs the gospel and man needs Christ and a Savior like the Savior Paul is expounding in this epistle to us. The ultimate answer is in the first verse of the passage we read this morning, verse 18 of chapter 1. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

That is man's ultimate plight. And Paul comes to it right at the very beginning of the main part of the epistle to the Romans. It is, you see, not just that man has to discover that he is a sinner, because even after we have discovered that, so often our real concern is about what sin does to us or what it possibly does to other people.

And I have seen people so often in my time in the ministry distressed and brokenhearted about both of these things, about what sin has done to them and the wreckage it has left in their lives, and about what sin has done in their families and in the lives of other people and the wreckage it has washed up into their lives. But, you see, the thing which makes sin serious is not what it does to me or what it does to others, ultimately. It is what it does to God.

And what the apostle is saying is that the ultimate seriousness of sin is that it calls down upon it and draws down upon it the active wrath and anger of a holy God. That's the ultimate seriousness of sin, and that is ultimately what makes it a serious thing to be a man or woman without Christ. The ultimate seriousness, you see, of being without Christ is not that you will be less happy than you would be with Christ.

The ultimate seriousness of being without Christ is that there is no shelter anywhere else in the universe from the wrath of God except in him. That's the unpalatable truth to which the apostle is introducing us here. And it would be very easy for us to dismiss this whole concept because we don't very much like the idea of it.

But let me draw your attention to the one word in verse 18 that is repeated from verse 17. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven. In other words, the wrath of God is a fact which God has revealed to us just as surely as he has revealed to us his love.

From heaven God has revealed the reality of his wrath and anger against sin. Where is God's wrath revealed? Well, it is obviously revealed, first of all, in scripture, and that, of course, is the only reliable

place to learn about God or about life or about salvation or about Jesus or about the gospel or about anything that concerns our eternal welfare. The only reliable place to go is the place where God has revealed the truth to us.

Now, you see, this is what makes it such a dangerous and not a casual or harmless thing for people to say. As people often say, well, now, I don't like to think about God like that. That's all very well for him or for people who have that kind of bias, but I don't like to think about God like that.

Here's how I like to think about God. I like to think about him like this. And then they describe to you the picture they have of God.

You see, my dear, dear friends, it doesn't really matter very much at all what kind of way I like to think about God. What matters is truth. Nothing else matters but truth.

And the man who is suffering from some muscle disease and says, I like to think that everything is going to work out all right, is living under a gross delusion. For what matters is truth. And this is what God has revealed to us in his word.

Now, perhaps one of the reasons we find this idea of God's anger so difficult is that we imagine that God's anger is the same as ours, and anger in human beings is really a very unpleasant thing normally, is it not? Because it usually speaks about a loss of self-control. That's normally what happens. When someone is angry, we speak about flaring up, and it's a description of a loss of self-control.

We have gone out of ourselves. We have lost our control of ourselves. And when you see that in human lives and human families, it is a most ugly thing.

But God's anger in Scripture is not a fitful passion. It is a settled, unchanging disposition and attitude which God has to everything that is not holy. It is the revulsion of his holy nature, and God's nature is constant.

His eternity speaks of this fact that God is unchanging. One of the things the Catechism says of him, he is unchanging, and he is unchanging always in his attitude to and reaction towards everything that contradicts his holiness. This is what God's wrath is.

Specifically, it is set against all ungodliness, verse 18, and unrighteousness as it ought to be translated of men. Ungodliness is the deranging of our relationship with God. Unrighteousness is the resultant disorder in all our other relationships, whether with ourselves or with other people.

Now, Scripture is absolutely clear and speaks with one voice that ungodliness and unrighteousness bring down God's anger upon them. That is a fact of Scripture which you cannot possibly avoid. That is why when you open the book of Genesis and find that when man has turned in rebellion against God, he pours out his righteous judgment and wrath upon them in the coming of the flood.

That's what Genesis 6 bears witness to. In the days of Abraham, when Sodom and Gomorrah had turned themselves to unrighteousness and ungodliness, then God speaks, albeit as it seems to Abraham with a broken heart, but he speaks of the revulsion that is on his spirit against all this ungodliness and unrighteousness, and he pours out his fire upon these cities. And that fire is the fire of God's anger.

Now, the whole history of God's dealings with men in Scripture speak of this. And if you think it is an Old Testament concept, and people have often said that's the picture of the Old Testament idea of God and

Jesus came to tell us something different, let me read you the words of Jesus. John 3, 36.

He who believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. And the whole history of God's judgments throughout Scripture speak of this. So that you discover some of the fiercest things that are said about God's wrath being said from the lips of Jesus.

Where is the wrath of God revealed from heaven? It's revealed in Scripture. But, of course, the ultimate place where the wrath of God will be revealed is on the day of judgment, which is called in the second chapter of Romans, verse 5, the day of wrath. But by 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.

Now that, of course, is what makes the day of judgment such an appalling prospect, you see. And some of the most fearful things again that are said about that day of judgment are said by Jesus. Now while those who are in Christ are appointed not to obtain wrath, but final salvation through Jesus Christ, yet the picture we have in the book of Revelation is a picture of the Lamb of God who was slain, who now is at the right hand of the Father in glory and shares the throne, because as heaven opens and they look into heaven they see the Lamb seated there and all the elders and all the multitude of God's people are worshiping and praising and blessing the Lamb who was slain, for he is the center of heaven's glory.

But, oh, there is another side to the Lamb. Have you read it? There is a picture of the Lamb in Revelation chapter 6 and verse 15. Listen to it.

Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the generals and the rich and the strong and every one slave and free hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne. Some who are desiring to see his face in order that they might glory in the beauties of the Lamb. Others who are saying to the rocks, fall on us, to the mountains, fall upon us that we may be hidden from the face of this one.

And listen, fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of his wrath has come and who can stand before it? How do you see how God brings together the picture of this intense love and mercy that he has in the Lamb of God with the full fury of his judgment and anger, the wrath of the Lamb? And this is not just an impersonal matter. It is apparently the personal indignation and anger of God against sin.

So the place where the wrath of God is revealed is in Scripture at the day of judgment. But the wrath of God is thirdly revealed in this present time. This is really what Paul is saying in this passage and we tend to forget it.

That the wrath of God is being revealed, it is revealed throughout the whole of history and it is being revealed in a certain way here in this appalling catalog of human sin and debauchery which you find in Romans 1 from verse 18. The sort of thing Keith Robery was saying to me in the vestry. One almost turns away from reading such an appalling passage as this.

But it is a passage that describes human history, beloved. It describes human nature. It exposes to us what is in the heart of man.

Do you notice that three times over in this passage Paul speaks of God giving men up. Notice in verse 24 and 26 and 28. Therefore God gave them up in the lust of their heart to impurity to the dishonoring of their

bodies among themselves because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie.

Verse 26. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions and verse 28. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct.

Now what God is doing you see is this. In his wrath he is taking his restraining hand off men's lives and sometimes off the whole of society to expose sin and show the world what is really in the heart of man. And God's anger against sin is often expressed in this way the apostle is saying.

Primarily against this one thing. Notice how often it occurs in this passage that when they knew God, verse 21, they did not honor him as God. That is even in the creation where men were able to see something of the glory and greatness and power of God.

They stifled that knowledge and they refused as far as the revelation of creation and of nature would lead them to honor and acknowledge God. They stifled that knowledge and they did not honor him. They exchanged, verse 23, the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.

Now that's idolatry of course. And let none of us say this morning, oh well this is a rather primitive society and we are not given to that kind of idolatry. Beloved, idolatry is worshipping something other than God.

Idolatry concerns what is first in your life. Idolatry means robbing God of his glory and giving that honor to something else or to someone else. So let us not look down upon these primitive people worshipping birds and beasts and so on.

Because idolatry is simply putting something in the place of God. So, verse 25, they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator. Now that ultimately is what calls down God's anger.

When men worship and serve the creature rather than the creator. Now look at this in verse 26, for this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions, their women, their men, and so on. Now you see, when you go through that catalog, we would all reply, almost all of us, well I don't behave like that, and of course the great majority of us don't.

But I want to say to you this morning that although this is not universal human behavior, it is universal human nature. And that is what gives weight and point to the phrase that so often tritely drops off our lips. You know the phrase that means next to nothing most times we say it.

When we see somebody in precisely this position that the epistles of the Romans chapter one is describing, we say, oh well, there but for the grace of God go I. And mostly we don't really believe that. But my beloved, that is nothing else than the sober truth, you know. Because this may not be a description of universal human behavior, but it is a description of universal human nature.

And it all has its roots from ungodliness. What do you think, for example, was the crucial point in the prodigal son's descent into the gutter where he fed the swine and longed to feed with them? Do you think the ultimate depth and nadir that the man reached was when he was down there in the pigsty? It wasn't at all, you see. It wasn't at all.

The crucial moment for that boy was when he turned his back on his father. And from that point there was nothing out of the question for him. And that's what's really serious about turning your back on God, and the wrath of God is revealed in society when God takes his restraining hand off the lives of men.

And we are beginning to see it in our society in our day, men and women. We are beginning to see it in the crass display of indecency and violence and disorder of every kind in the world. And sometimes it is the evidence of a holy God displaying his anger by taking his restraining hand.

I sometimes wonder, going through Glasgow, what would happen if God in his holy judgment had to take his hand utterly off the city. But there is one other place where the wrath of God is revealed. Would you be surprised if I told you that it is revealed more than anywhere else in history or in the universe? At the cross.

This is the amazing thing about the gospel, and it is to this that Paul is going to be leading up as he expounds this gospel to us in these next chapters. It is that there is no place in all heaven or earth where the wrath of God has been so revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men as when our Savior hung upon Calvary and experienced what it was to go out into the outer darkness from which he cried, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? That reality that was projected into his soul in Gethsemane when he shrank from this, not from suffering, from physical anguish. What was it that our Savior shrank from? In Gethsemane, as he said, this cup, Father, the cup that he saw before his eyes which he was to drink, if it be possible, let it pass from me.

Well, now, that cup is very clearly defined in Scripture. In the prophets, it is the cup of the wrath of God, the cup into which his anger is poured, which men must drink if they will be unrepentant. It is the cup of God's wrath in revelation, and Jesus drank it as he bore our sins, and that's where you see the wrath of God.

Isn't it striking that there is no place in heaven or earth where you see the love of God more radiantly than in the cross of Jesus? And there is no place where you see the wrath of God in all its fullness, but in the cross of Jesus, because what was being poured out upon him was the wrath of a holy God against my sin. And that's what makes the gospel so utterly amazing, and the love of God so astonishing. That's why we sing, amazing love, how can it be that thou, my God, should die for me? Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! O Christ, what burdens bowed thy head? My load was laid on thee.

Jehovah's sword awoke against thee. My dear friends, calvary will never cut into your heart in all its reality until you have grasped and accepted what Jesus bore there for you. And the need of a needy world, respectable and deuce though it may be, will never burn itself into your being until you have grasped what Jesus came to reveal to us.

A love that was beyond our understanding, and a wrath that was beyond our measuring. And now at the beginning of chapter 2 and through to the end of verse 20 of chapter 3, Paul continues and sustains the great argument that he has already begun. And what we are going to try to do today in the few minutes we have for our study is to grasp together the basic argument that the apostle employs in these verses.

Because indeed that is precisely what he is doing. He is arguing out his case as he presumably did in synagogue after synagogue in the ancient world. He is imagining himself once more facing a multitude of Jews who have heard that something remarkable has happened in his life.

And now he is wanting to show to them, the Jews to whom the gospel was originally promised, that they stand in as much need of the gospel because they also stand under the judgment and condemnation of the God whose wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men. And in order to sweep through the course of the argument and to give you the bare bones that you can put flesh and blood on sometime later today if you are able, I want to try to outline Paul's argument by emphasizing three major planks in what he says. And you will notice, I think, as you read through it, that there are indeed three stages of the message he is preaching and the argument that he is using.

The first stage is described in chapter 2 verses 1 to 16. The second in chapter 2 verse 17 through to chapter 3 verse 8. And the third stage is recorded in chapter 3 verses 9 to 20. And we will look at these arguments in and of their own account and we will see as we do so how the apostle Paul as his testimony builds one argument upon another in order that he may draw his final conclusion that all men, whether Jew or Gentile, whether pagan or religious, stand in need of the grace of God because they find themselves under the wrath and curse and judgment of God.

Now the first thing that he argues in chapter 2 verses 1 to 16, the first thing he argues is the principles of God's judgment. And what he is wanting to say is this, if you will stop and think for a moment about the principles God uses when he judges men, then you will see that both Jew and Gentile alike come under his condemnation. Now I rather imagine that the apostle Paul had used the material that he writes to the Romans in many of his sermons in the synagogues in which he was wont to preach.

And I have very little doubt that if he began to expound as he did in chapter 1 how the wrath of God was poured out upon the Gentile world that the hearts of many of his listeners would rise, perhaps even some of them would be crying out, Amen brother Paul. And certainly you can imagine some of them going together to the door at the end of the service and saying to one another before they shook hands with him, he was really letting them have it today wasn't he? My what an exposé of the sinfulness and the need of those Gentile dogs. And just as they reached out their hand to shake hands with him to say that was a powerful word this morning brother Paul, he would say to them my dear friends don't you realize you're in exactly the same boat? Don't you see that if God is a just God in his judgment of the Gentiles then you who condemn these Gentiles and do the same things are also under the condemnation and the wrath of God.

And he demonstrates this to these Jewish people primarily by indicating the basic principles by which God judges men and there are four of them that he mentions. The first principle of God's judgment he says is that it is based on truth. You notice how he puts it in verse two, now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth, is according to truth.

And you see what he's saying, he is saying that God judges men not by their outward profession but by the inward reality of their lives. Indeed one of the commentators suggests that the word might be better translated as it well could have been not truth but reality. God judges men according to what they are really like and not according to what they profess with their lips.

And here are these Jews who have condemned other men and Paul comes and says why if you are condemning them do you do the same things yourselves. Not of course that he is necessarily meaning that outwardly they perform the same hideous acts that he had described in chapter one. The very words of Jesus should have taught the Jewish nation that it is not the outward act that God looks upon but the inward motivation of the heart.

And your heart says Paul to these Jews are no different from those gentile dogs whom you despise. And because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart verse five you are also storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath when his righteous judgment will be revealed. So God does not judge men merely by their profession he judges men according to the inner reality of their lives.

And then secondly Paul says God judges men not only on the basis of truth but he judges men according to their works. Notice how he puts it in verse six quoting from Psalm 62 and from Proverbs 24. God he says will give to each person according to what he has done.

In other words God's judgment of men will not be based merely on the privileges they have enjoyed it will be based rather on what they have done. And that principle says Paul applies to Jew and gentile alike. Notice how he puts it in verses nine and ten.

There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil. First for the Jew and then for the gentile. And then in verse 11 and this is so because God shows no favoritism or partiality.

The third principle of God's judgment is this in verse 12. He judges on the basis of reality he judges on the basis of a man's work. He judges men according to the life that he has given them.

You see how he puts it in verse 12. All who sin apart from the law will perish apart from the law and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. In other words he says those who have had the clear revelation of God's law will be judged by that standard.

Those who have not had that privilege will not be judged by that standard but by the light that they have received. And he goes on you notice later on in the passage from verse 14 to verse 15 to indicate that the gentiles also have received a great deal of light because the things that were written in the law that God requires of men were also written in large measure in their hearts and you can see that says Paul amongst the gentile nations when they do what the law requires. That's an indication that there is some vestige written in their hearts of what God truly requires of men.

But all men he says will be judged according to the light they have received. And the fourth principle is in verse 16 that they will be judged according to Jesus Christ. The father said Jesus in John 5 has committed all judgment into my hands and so says the apostle Paul this is the great standard of the judgment of God that we are judged by the standard of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the significance of that you notice he says is that God will be able to judge men's secrets rightly and justly. He will not merely judge men according to the law according to the great commandments that have been written through though that is but he will judge through Jesus Christ who knows the inner secrets of the human existence. Who knows the frailties and the temptations we experience and also knows the way in which when given opportunity we fail to take it because he has come down among us and he has discerned the intentions and the situations and the needs and the sinfulness of the human heart right down here in the midst of it.

And so there will never be a possibility of saying to God on the day of judgment you don't understand what it was like. Because we will be judged as the apostle according to the Lord Jesus Christ and his judgments will descend where no human eye could ever descend. And so he says there are these four principles.

The judgment of God is based on reality and truth. The judgment of God is based on the work that a man has done. The judgment of God is based on the light he has received.

The judgment of God is according to the standard of the Lord Jesus Christ. And therefore there is no excuse. There is no excuse for any of us as for any of them saying to God when we face his final aside I didn't know the standard if I'd only known the standard.

Know now this day although you had never heard it before you and I together know the standard that God employs. And from this day forward even although we had never heard a word of God before we cannot say that God has left us in the dark. But I wonder if we really grasp the implications of what Paul is saying because it is so easy to miss them as we run through this passage.

But what Paul is saying in essence is that these four principles of judgment are also and inevitably four principles of condemnation. Is it not true that we can so easily say when we read these things well if that's true if God judges us on the basis of reality then there will be no partiality he will be fair and everything as well. If he judges on the basis of my works and not my profession then all is well.

If he judges on the basis of the light I've received then he's not unjust. If he judges on the basis of the standard of Jesus Christ then what a comfort that is gentle Jesus, neat and mild. But that's not what Paul is trying to say to us you see.

He is trying to show us that these standards are not only standards of general judgment but when applied they bring universal condemnation. That's his point. They don't bring comfort at all to us.

They bring terror and fear into our hearts or ought to. Because says Paul if God judges us on the basis of reality then all the pretense and hypocrisy of our lives sinks into the ground and into the dust. If God judges us on the basis of our works then do you remember what he says what will that mean? That will mean that there will be condemnation.

That will mean that there will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil. Yes there will be glory and honor and praise for everyone who perfectly keeps the law of God. But who amongst us perfectly keeps the law of God? And for those not in that category of sheer impossibility says Paul there is trouble and distress for every human being who does evil.

The Jew first and also the Gentile and then if we say that we are going to be judged according to the light that we have had let us listen again to Paul's words. All who sin apart from the law will perish apart from the law and all who sin under the law will be judged to condemnation by the law. But how we are going to be judged we may say by Jesus Christ.

Yes by Jesus Christ. By Jesus Christ in whose presence we will hang our heads and break our hearts in shame and remorse and personal agony. That with such a savior offered to us and such a standard set before us we have fallen short of the glory of God and by nature are under his wrath and condemnation.

And indeed the very privileges that we have received are privileges says Paul that will aggravate the seriousness of our condition. And so the great thing that he is laying out for us primarily is the great principles of God's judgment that should make us all feel that we come under the condemnation of God. But then of course it is always true when anyone preaches on these things as Paul must often have done.

But the second thing he has to deal with is the defense that men make against God's judgment. And you notice how from the beginning of verse 17 of chapter 2 and through into verse 8 of chapter 3 Paul begins to deal with the man that he imagined sitting there in the congregation saying but. It's all very well for you to speak like that but I have staff and things I want to object to what you're saying.

I want to show you that your argument doesn't really follow. And he deals systematically and faithfully with some of the objections that are raised. You will notice what they are.

In verses 17 to 24 the objection of says to Paul but you forget we Jews have the law. We are those who receive that great privilege from God on Mount Sinai. And Paul recognized both before his conversion and after it that it was an immense privilege to have the law.

But do you notice what he says? He says my friend do you not see? It is not having the law that matters. It is keeping the law that matters. Have you kept the law then? And one argument drifts away into silence.

And as is characteristic of those who object to the preaching of the Apostle Paul the arguer takes what he thinks is a safer position. Okay Paul he says but you are forgetting something else. We are those who are circumcised.

We were given this great sacrament of the gospel in the Old Testament. Ah yes Chris Paul we can shake hands on that. Circumcision verse 25 is of great value.

But what does circumcision mean? It means that you are separated for the whole of your life to live to the praise and honor and glory of God in heaven. And what have you done? Circumcision is of value he says if you live a life that is consistent and you keep the law. But you have offended God's law.

You have broken God's law. You are in exactly the same position as these Gentiles. You hypocrite he says.

Your circumcision will be a sign of your condemnation. Ah but wait a minute says somebody in the congregation. You're beginning to speak Paul as though there was no advantage in being a Jew.

You're beginning to throw the Old Testament out. You're beginning to deny all that God has done for us in the past and saying there's no privilege in being a Jew. No no says Paul chapter 3 verse 1. What advantage is there in being a Jew? Of what value is there in circumcision? Much he says in every way.

There are inestimable blessings in being brought up where God has given you so much life as he has given to you. But do you notice what he says? He says even when you have proved unfaithful God has proved faithful. But God's faithfulness in the midst of your unfaithfulness will aggravate and increase the condemnation you receive.

And those privileges that God extended to you in his grace when you despise them and trample upon them and do not see that his kindness is meant to lead you to repentance. Then you will stand before the throne of God to be judged by a greater law, by greater privileges, by increased light than all other men. The greater your privileges the greater your responsibility.

Oh well says someone in the congregation. If my sin demonstrates the faithfulness and the justice of God how can God possibly condemn me when my sin is beginning to demonstrate how faithful he is. The last resort of the man who seeks to wriggle away from the power of the message of the gospel is to begin to argue in a way that is utterly blasphemous, to begin to treat the gospel and the God of the gospel as though he were someone with whom a man could argue by triplogic and by superficial argumentation.

Do you see the point that the man is making? If my sin shows to men how faithful God has been despite my sin then he's got no reason to judge me. And do you notice that Paul doesn't even bother really to

answer the question. When a man has gone so far wriggling out of the condemning power of the word of God that he begins to blaspheme against God and thinks he can shake his fist in the face of almighty God then the apostle Paul has no more to say than that he says is where we stand.

Not only are we under the condemnation of God as Jews as people so much like but he has systematically taken the feet from every single one of our objections and so he turns from the man who seeks refuge in smart talk and argumentation in verses 9 to 20 of chapter 3. To tend to the third stage in his argument which is to outline for us the verdict that is passed by the judgment of God. What is his conclusion? Verse 9. Are we any better? Not at all. We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin and he begins to quote the scriptures to them.

Their own inspired authority to indicate that the very scriptures in which they trusted indicate to them that this is their dire position. Their understanding has turned from God. Their speech betrays the rebellion of their heart.

The way of their life is an affront to a holy God. They have lost their way. They do not know where they can find peace.

And so he concludes in verses 19 and 20 that whatever the law says it says to those under the law so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God for no one will be declared righteous in the sight of God by observing the law but rather through the light of the revelation of the law of God comes nothing but condemnation and condemnation and more condemnation. The verdict that is now pronounced on all men both Jew and Gentile alike is the verdict of guilty, condemned, lost, damned, before a holy God and when that verdict is pronounced through God's word now as it will be pronounced there and then on the day of judgment Paul says every single mouth will be shut and no one will have any excuse. No one in the sight of God will offer any argument but stand in condemned silence and recognize that the judgment of God is just and true and righteous altogether.

And the glory of the gospel my dear friends to which we will be turning increasingly in the chapters that follow is this. That it is when we find ourselves condemned by God's law by God's holiness and righteousness and when we begin to close those mouths that are constantly arguing with God and saying to him that we have done something to justify ourselves in his presence when that mouth is shut once and for all then our hearts will be silenced and we will be able to hear that God has made another way for us in his son Jesus Christ. But no man has ever heard that way.

No woman has ever heard that gospel truly ringing in their hearts until their mouths have been shut. As we have run through this argument this morning there is really only one question that we need to ask ourselves. Are our mouths really shut? Has all our arguing with God about ourselves and our own righteousness and all that we have done in the face of his holy law that will justify us in his sight, have all our arguments been silenced before him that every mouth may be stopped and all the world held guilty before God in order that God may come to us with the message of the gospel and tell us that in his son there is free and full forgiveness for all who will trust him.

For my friends we do not need to return to this place next Lord's day in order to receive him who will open our mouths again. We can receive him now and when our mouths are silenced in the presence of a holy God our ears may begin to be opened to the message of the forgiveness of all our sins in Jesus Christ. May God seal something of the argument of his word upon our hearts.

We sing in closing part of hymn 78, part of hymn 78 verses 1 and 4, Jesus lover of my soul let me to thy bosom fly while the nearer waters roll while the tempest still is high hide me oh my savior hide till the storm of life is past safe and to the heaven guide or receive my soul at last. Number 78.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/23/SID23673.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/sinclair-ferguson/what-is-the-wrath-of-god/>

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