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Sermon Notes

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## **God's Anger At The First Dark Exchange: Idolatry**

### **Romans 1:18-23**

- John Calvin, hiding in the south of France, 1535, tender age of 26, began his first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

**“Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”**

True, sound wisdom... contrasted with foolishness

Key to it all: knowledge of God, knowledge of ourselves... Naturally, we know neither, because of our sin

- Romans primary purpose is to give that sound wisdom
- To know God as He truly is... the TRUTH of His incredible majesty and glory, not some idol
- To know ourselves as we truly are... the TRUTH of ourselves and the effect of our sin
- Romans 1-3 does precisely this... removes idolatrous views of God; removes illusion of self-glory
- Glorious portrait of God, but perhaps unfamiliar to us
- Ugly portrait of ourselves, but also unfamiliar to us
- DANGER: SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS!!!!

***Romans 2:1 “You therefore have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.”***

## I. Review

- A. The Gospel of God: Supernatural Power for Complete Salvation

B. Righteousness of God: Both Our Greatest Problem AND Our Only Salvation

Today we'll come face to face with the wrath of God, and why we must flee from the wrath to come

## II. The Wrath of God: God's Passionate Response to Evil

### A. What is God's wrath?

1. Greek ideal of God: dispassionate thinking machine
2. Biblical view: a passionate being

He rejoices, he is grieved, he laughs at rebellion, he is compassionate, he is angry

3. God's wrath: **His passionate response to evil**

### B. "Revealed from heaven"

1. Tense: present continuous... "is presently being revealed from heaven..."
2. "Revealed" = unveiled, hidden then made known
  - a. unlike God's invisible qualities seen in Creation
  - b. this cannot be discerned but is being revealed
3. How revealed?
  - a. revealed in the evils of life... sickness, poverty, suffering, family break-ups, etc.
  - b. revealed in being given over to sin: addictions
  - c. revealed in death
  - d. revealed also in the gospel message which interprets all this evil as wrath... AND speaks of a **future wrath**

***Matthew 3:7 "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?'"***

- e. the only way to escape the coming wrath: repentance and faith in Christ

***Romans 5:9 "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him."***

***1 Thessalonians 1:10 “Jesus... rescues us from the coming wrath.”***

III. The Cause of Wrath: Wicked Suppression of Truth Resulting in Failure to Worship

Steps to Paul’s argument:

- 4) The conclusion: All men are without excuse and deserve the wrath of God.
- 3) This is because they do not glorify God as God or give him thanks.
- 2) This failure of appropriate worship is not because of innocent ignorance of God, but in spite of sufficient knowledge about God.
- 1) God has made himself evident in the universe
  - A. “Suppress the truth in unrighteousness”... SPIN DOCTORS
    1. suppress: a strong word implying a conscious choice
    2. no infant comes into the world with a loyalty to truth... just a loyalty to self
    3. “in unrighteousness”: our sin nature causes us to suppress & twist the truth
  - B. What truth?

***vs. 19 “... since what may be known about God is plain to them”***

What truth about God?

***Romans 11:36 “For from him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be glory forever and ever.”***

1. God the Creator... so I was made by Him
2. God the Commander... so He has all authority over me
3. God the Sustainer... so everything I need for life He gives me, as though I’m on welfare
4. God the Judge... so everything I do is assessed, judged

C. God’s Self-revelation

***vs. 19-20 “... since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities—His***

*eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made so that men are without excuse.”*

1. Argument from intelligent design: not logically inescapable, but morally inexcusable

Immanuel Kant: brilliant philosopher, destroyed arguments for the existence of God

Not logically inescapable, BUT morally inexcusable

2. Revelation effective:

**“What may be known about God is plain to them...God has made it plain to them...Being clearly seen...Being understood...”**

No one will be able to say on Judgment Day, “It never entered my mind that you existed, God. You never made your existence clear to me.”

3. How? CREATION!!!

- a. God’s immensity shown in the heavens
- b. God’s consistency shown in the regularity of the sun
- c. God’s love shown in provision and delight of food
- d. God’s power shown in thunder and lightning
- e. God’s inscrutability in the mysteries of the atom
- f. God’s wisdom shown in our own bodies

“Natural theology”... study of attributes of God as seen in the universe... should be **“Scientist worshippers”**

Charles Goodyear on rubber: “Who can examine it and not glorify God?”

4. Suppression of scientists

- a. Darwin’s theories: Natural selection

Time + chance = all things... “billions and billions of years” explains everything...

- b. modern testimonies of suppression

Richard Dawkins, an "arch-Darwinian" who says, "**Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose.**" Francis Crick, the co-discoverer of DNA, says, "**Biologists must constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed, but rather evolved**"

c. Modern testimonies of intelligent design

Michael Behe's book, Darwin's Black Box, bacterial flagellum, bushings for sealing, acid-driven rotary motor, etc.

5. Suppression of non-scientists

- a. day by day, moral suppression going on
- b. twist the truth about God
- c. result: creating idols

D. Human duty: Glorify God and Give Him Thanks

*vs. 21 "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened*

1. Glorify God: prize Him as ultimately worthy... worship!!!

*Habakkuk 2:14 "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."*

2. Give thanks to God

- a. a form of worship
- b. other-centered, acknowledging dependence on beneficence of Creator

BUT... that would make it like we're constantly on welfare, receiving handouts from God... we like to think of ourselves as self-sufficient... So, we reject the truth of God... we suppress it; we hate it, and twist it

IV. Result of Failed Worship: The First Dark Exchange... IDOLATRY

NOTE: Not atheism, but idolatry!!! We WILL worship something!

A. Result of truth suppression = futile thinking, darkened hearts

1. Thinking as a moral exercise
  - a. why did God give us minds, reasoning & passion? ANIMALS don't think!
  - b. appraising as worship
2. BUT when we suppress the truth of God in our minds, our thinking becomes futile

Example: Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4...

***Daniel 4:30 "Is this not the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"***

God turned him into a beast for seven years

***Daniel 4:34 "At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High, and honored and glorified him who lives forever."***

3. Moral faculty hardened... HEARTS DARKENED
  - a. self-deception
  - b. no longer even know we're doing it
  - c. BIBLE HAS A WORD FOR THIS: DARKNESS

Glory of God the only true light... it shines in the New Jerusalem

B. Dark exchange

***vs. 22-23 "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles."***

***vs. 25 "They worshipped and served created things more than the creator who is forever praised."***

... and the number one "created thing" they worship is ME!!!

1. Idolatry: forming an image to represent an idea of God

***Isaiah 44:12-17 The blacksmith takes a tool and works with it in the coals; he shapes an idol with hammers, he forges it with the might of his arm...<sup>13</sup> The carpenter measures***

*with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form of man, of man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine. <sup>14</sup> ...He ... fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it. <sup>16</sup> ... He prays to it and says, "Save me; you are my god."*

2. True issue is the idea itself which is worshipped

3. Attraction: to be able to fashion God yourself... WISDOM

not God as Supreme Creator      not God as Command-Giver

not God as Life Sustainer      not God as Final Judge

This finally gives us power over God... to make Him in our image, after our likeness... to control the way we think about God and finally come out from under His authority

Whoever makes this exchange thinks they are WISE... BUT GOD says it is FOOLISHNESS, emptiness, arrogance... it will destroy your soul

C. Infinite Exchange: Glory of Incorruptible God for... NOTHINGS

1. Hebrew word for idols: "nothings"

a. idolatry a consistent problem for Israel

b. Moses on Mt. Sinai, Aaron made a gold bull... "Here is your god, O Israel"

bull symbolized God's strength & power, but it was insufficient!!

c. Isaiah greatest preacher against idols: he called them "nothings"

God is the I AM

Isaiah says idols "ARE NOT"

d. idols usually combined various attributes worthy of a deity

e. BUT "to what will you compare me to?" says God

2. Paul's strange language:

***"They exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image of a likeness of corruptible man..."***

a. double language... "an image of an image..."

- b. man is created in the image of God
- c. so “an image of an image of an image of God...”
- d. Paul’s stress... distance from the true God... worthlessness of idolatry

***Isaiah 40:6 “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.”***

That exchange is FOOLISHNESS... it is also the root of our sinfulness

***Romans 3:23 “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” BETTER “All have sinned and they LACK the glory of God”***

WE TRADED IT IN FOR SOMETHING WORTHLESS... CRY to get God’s glory back!!

## V. Summary, Remedy, Application

### A. Summary

1. True wisdom: Knowledge of God & knowledge of self

**“Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”**

Romans 1-3 tells us the truth about both... danger of evasion & self-righteousness

2. The Wrath of God: God’s passionate response to evil
  - Unpopular doctrine
  - No less true because its unpopular... Jesus came to save us from that wrath
3. The Cause of the Wrath: The First Dark Exchange... Idolatry
  - God has made himself evident in creation
  - Therefore we have enough knowledge about God to glorify and thank Him
  - We suppress this truth about God in unrighteousness
  - Therefore we refuse to glorify Him and thank Him... rather, we make idols and worship them
  - Therefore, we have no excuse, and deserve the full wrath and curse of God on Judgment Day



B. The Remedy: Salvation

***Romans 1:18 “For the wrath of God is being revealed...”***

***Romans 1:17 “In the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed...”***

1. A free gift of righteousness that is by faith to all who believe
2. Simple faith reverses the darkness... all of a sudden, the darkness of God is replaced by the light of His glory

C. Application

1. Self-knowledge: don't twist and evade the truth... acknowledge that Romans 1 is talking about you
2. Knowledge of God: don't be an idolator

America: Andre Agassi's Cannon ads, "Image is everything!"...No, the Glory of God is everything!!

- a. "I like to think of God as a \_\_\_\_\_ God"
- b. Greed, covetousness, earthly living

Fortune Magazine:

- Omega watches: "The world is not enough"
- Cessna Citation X Business Jet... Accura RL Luxury Sedan: "Starting at \$42,000."
- Ashford.com , irresistible watches, pens, jewelry, fragrances, leather goods, just a click away: "All the stuff you really, really want."

***Colossians 3:5 “Put to death... greed which is idolatry.”***

3. Flee the wrath to come!!

***Colossians 3:6 “Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.”***

***Romans 3:25 “God presented Christ as a propitiation through faith in his blood.”***

Wrath of God totally averted through faith in Christ

4. Exchange darkness for God's glory

***Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned and lack the glory of God.”***

***2 Corinthians 4:6 “For God, who said ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”***