



Lenten Series Week 2

## The Righteous Live by Faith

Romans 1:18 | March 17, 2019

*“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” (Romans 1:18)*

**Introduction:** Humanity is in a deeply troubled position. There is ungodliness and unrighteousness that suppresses the truth, and for this reason God’s wrath is revealed.

These are striking statements to our eyes, but Paul is trying to make an observation about what is self-evidently true. Humanity from the very beginning has been infected with the inclination to set God aside. We humans confuse the giver of the gifts with the gifts themselves. This is just what Paul is getting at when he writes of exchanging the truth of God for images of created things – and an image is what the Bible calls an idol.

While it’s not common in our culture to keep little ornate houses with small statues, still idolatry surrounds us. That’s because idolatry is not about little statues as much as it is about an ambition for purpose and meaning, value and significance. What gives you meaning and purpose? What receives your deepest allegiance? We are invariably tempted to get our deepest meaning from things other than from our creator. And when a person seeks meaning, purpose, and identity anywhere other than the waters of baptism, that person is worshiping idols.

And let’s be frank. In our modern world, more than any before, there are voices seeking to tell us who we are, what gives us value, and what can fill our lives with significance. It could look like almost anything: family, physical appearance, material possessions, professional success, political affiliation, notoriety, sexuality, intellectual prowess — even moral uprightness and charity are avenues to pursue value, meaning, purpose and significance apart from God.

Because dead idols cannot keep their promises, Paul describes those who follow idols as having ‘futile minds’ and ‘dark hearts’; that is, those following idols are powerless and blind. This practice of seeking ultimate meaning in unworthy places suppresses the truth: namely, that only God can give the gifts of purpose, meaning, value and significance. Seeking to satisfy these longings by other means is ungodly and unrighteous. And it is because of this disordered allegiance to the creation over the creator that God’s wrath is revealed.

And what does God's wrath look like? Is it lightning bolts or hail stones, plagues or infestations? No, it’s worse than any of that. In verses 24, 26 and 28 the divine penalty is repeated. God’s punishment for idolatry is to “give them up” to the cruelty of false gods — to their lustful impurity (v. 24), to dishonorable passions (v. 26), and debased minds (v. 28).

**Pray:** Almighty God, you are the beginning and the ending of all things. You made us with a desire for significance and meaning in this life. And having made us with these longings you lead us into the waters of baptism where your father’s voice speaks over us together with you; that in you we are your Father’s beloved child and great delight. Forgive us for seeking to be the apple of any other eye. Help to build our lives on the foundation the identity you give us in baptism and save us from building towers reaching to the heavens. AMEN.

**READ ROMANS 1:18-32**

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**Discussion:** In our milieu the conversation about God's wrath is sparse at best.

1. Read John 3:36, Ephesians 5:2-8, and Hebrew 3:7-19 and discuss God's wrath as it comes in each of these contexts.

Paul writes that the character of God can be seen "in the things that have been made" (v. 20).

2. Discuss what characteristics of God can be seen in creation. What do made things tell us about the maker of the things?
3. What is the difference between worshiping the things and the maker of the things?
4. The things that draw me to idolatry are not all the same as the things that draw you. Where besides God are you inclined to go for purpose, meaning, value and significance?

In the introduction we observed that "when a person seeks meaning, purpose, and identity anywhere other than the waters of baptism, that person is worshiping idols." Discuss the places people seek identity in our time. Consider the relationship of idolatry on 'identity politics.'

5. What role is appropriate in our cultural climate of identity politics for those whose identity is primarily given by Christ?
6. Imagine that you were a part of a discriminated group whose identity came to be largely found in the shared suffering of your race, creed, language, gender, sexual orientation, or political affiliation. What is the good news of Jesus Christ for you?
7. The bible calls us away from idolatry and into true and faithful worship (through Jesus Christ). The Bible also commands us to love justice; to hunger for what is right. What can it mean to love and struggle for justice and not become enmeshed in identity politics?

### Application:

Baptism is a dual image of death and new life; a baptismal font reminds us at once of a watery grave and the watery fluids at the birth of a child. Entry to the kingdom is for those not only born of water, but also of spirit (John 3:5). Reflect on your own life and death in baptism. In what ways are you dying? In what ways are you entering new and eternal life? Imagine that a baptismal font sits in the front entry of your home, school or work place. What difference would it mean to go into your typical Thursday knowing that meaning and value, identity and significance, come only and freely through union with Jesus Christ in baptism?

**Pray:** Lord Jesus, you alone satisfy the longings of our hearts and hunger for a life that matters. Truly we are restless until we rest in you. And rest is not a thing which we can achieve, but a repose received in the death of baptism. Liberate us anew by your Spirit into the jubilant freedom of a life hidden in God with you. For each of the created things in which we seek significance, grant us your grace to turn from sin and its power in the world and run with gladness into your loving embrace.  
AMEN