



# #1 “Can a loving God also get angry?”

*To consider that it is only an indifferent God who wouldn't become angry at humanity, and that this anger is warranted (from Romans 1:18-32).*

“Romans” is a letter in the latter half of the Bible. It is believed to have been written around 60's AD, by the Apostle Paul, to the young church in Rome (hence the name). Paul wanted to encourage the church by explaining the “gospel” to them. The key sentence of the letter is this: **“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...” [Romans 1:16]**<sup>1</sup>

The word “gospel” just means good news. The good news is to do with salvation – with being saved from God's anger at humanity.

Q1. Are you surprised to learn that God has an “anger problem”?

*• If your initial response is surprise then you are probably not alone. Most people generally like to think of “God” as someone who accepts everybody, who doesn't judge, who loves everyone indiscriminately. If God is loving then surely he can't be angry....or so the logic goes.*

Tim Keller wrote a New York Times bestseller called “Reason for God” in 2008. In it he writes<sup>2</sup>:

**“Like most other Christian ministers in our society, I have been asked literally thousands of times, ‘How can a God of love also be filled with wrath and anger? If he is loving and perfect, he should forgive and accept everyone. He shouldn't get angry.’ I always start my response by pointing out that all loving people are sometimes filled with wrath, not just despite of but because of their love. If you love a person and you see someone ruining them – even they themselves – you get angry. .... Anger isn't the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference...”**

Q2. What do you think of Keller's response?

<sup>1</sup> All bible quotations from HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION, Copyright © 2001, 2005 by Biblica ®. All rights reserved worldwide.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Keller, “Reason for God”, Penguin, 2008, p73.

## Romans 1:18-32<sup>3</sup>

18 [For] the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 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.

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

24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Q3. If God is angry, then what according to Paul is he angry about?

• According to Paul, every single one of us can know something of God from looking at creation, and respond appropriately: “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. 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” (Romans 1:20-21). Instead they “suppress the truth” and turn to idols (Romans 1:21-23). In other words, looking at creation should tell us that God is there and that he is powerful. Instead of acknowledging this truth, humanity has turned to worship things other than God. This is what God is angry about.

You may have heard the expression “God hates the sin but loves the sinner”. There are elements in society today that separate the action from the person. For example, parents are encouraged not to say to children “you’re bad” but to say “what you did just then was bad”.

## Psalm 5:5 – song from the Old Testament, written around 1000BC

<sup>3</sup> There is actually a “for” at the beginning of verse 18 in the original language the letter was written in (koine Greek). The “for” is causal.

## **“The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong”**

Q4. Considering what Paul writes and this line from a Psalm...Is God angry at humanity itself, or just humanity's actions?

- *Humankind and their (wicked) actions can't be separated like that. It is the person who does the suppressing, who commits the sin that results in God's anger. The implication of seeing that God hates the sin AND the sinner is that it makes the human situation worse... which in turn, magnifies the generosity of God's forgiveness.*

Q5. Should God be angry at people who don't even know they have done something wrong?

- *According to Paul, every single one of us SHOULD be able to know something of God by looking at creation – that he is powerful and eternal. The problem is humanity suppresses that truth (Romans 1:20-21). This means that the problem when it comes to God isn't ignorance (a lack of perception) but disobedience (moral failure)... leaving humankind without an excuse and therefore culpable before God.*
- *The real question then becomes: How do people respond when they do hear the news of how God is offering to save them – through the sacrifice of Jesus. Do they respond in trust or do they “suppress that truth” too?*
- *What about those who never hear about Jesus? Answer: we can say that if God is a God of justice, then he will judge people fairly according to what they know.*

Q6. How is God's anger being expressed?

- *Notice the repeated refrain “God gave them over” (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). The ‘therefore’ (Romans 1:24), ‘because of this’ (Romans 1:26), and ‘since’ (Romans 1:28) indicate that God's ‘giving over’ is in specific response to the wicked suppression of the truth.*
- *What is this saying? Answer: when humanity rejects God, God rejects humanity. Note that God doesn't just leave humanity to itself - he actively hands them over to their own devices. They lose what knowledge of God they had, as their minds become more depraved and their lives more sinful / lived out in opposition to God (Romans 1:28).*
- *There is also anger expressed in a future sense too... those who sin deserve “death” (Romans 1:32).*

Looking at Paul's list in Romans 1:24-27, what is perhaps hardest to swallow is what Paul says about homosexuality. For the gay community – and mainstream society – this just confirms the judgmental attitude of the church and Christianity.

## **Genesis 2:23-25 – the first book of the Bible thought to be written around 1800BC**

**But for Adam no suitable helper was found. <sup>21</sup> So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. <sup>22</sup> Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.**

<sup>23</sup> **The man said,**

**“This is now bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;**

**she shall be called 'woman,'  
for she was taken out of man. ”**

**<sup>24</sup> That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.**

Q7. In Paul's list, why do you think homosexuality would be singled out?

*• In Genesis, humankind was made in the image of God – both male and female together were made in the image of God (Genesis 2:23-25). So humankind's rejection of God is bound to lead to the undermining of these primary relationships. Homosexuality is named therefore, not because it is a greater sin than any other, but because it is the clearest evidence of rejection of God/suppression of the truth.*

Ted Bundy was a notorious serial killer in the US in the late 1970's. He was implicated in the murder of 30 women and sent to the electric chair in 1989<sup>4</sup>.

### **Bundy Is Put to Death in Florida After Admitting Trail of Killings**

"Ted Bundy was a complex man who somewhere along the line went wrong," Mr. Blair [who worked on the Bundy crimes] said. **"He killed for the sheer thrill of the act and the challenge of escaping his pursuers.** ... The killer, who stalked victims in the Pacific Northwest in the mid-1970's terrorized several university communities, selecting coeds for abduction from campuses at night or crowded parks in daytime when their defenses were lowered in familiar settings. Accounts of witnesses and other evidence in crimes he was believed to have committed show that he typically used his good looks and soft-spoken charm -often bandaging an arm or leg to gain sympathy or help - to lure them to their death.

Q8. With the extensive list in Romans 1:29-31, is Paul saying that we're all as bad as Ted Bundy?  
*• No – he's not saying we are all as bad as we could be. He is saying that we fail to measure up to God's standards (principally in rejecting the truth about God). The list is comprehensive so that every reader will find him/herself on it. All humankind is subject to God's anger for their rejection of him.*

Written by Caroline Spencer of City Bible Forum. 2012.

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<sup>4</sup> Jon Nordheimer, *Special to the New York Times*, Published: January 25, 1989.