WRATH REVEALED
Series: Righteousness Revealed
Romans 1:18-32
Chadron Berean Church

Last week I introduced a question we'll be answering in our drive through Romans. It's the question, What in the world is God doing today? To answer that question, I suppose many people would be tempted to turn to the newspaper. As we'll see, that's actually not a bad place to turn. A better place to turn, however, would be Romans 1:18-32 because not only will you see the same thing you'll see in your newspaper, but you'll also start to understand *why* you see what you see in your newspaper—that is, the wrath of God being revealed. That's what we're going to talk about.

I. THE CAUSE OF GOD'S WRATH. (1:18-23)

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Last week we ended with the theme verses for Romans (vv. 16-17) which talk about God's **righteousness being revealed** in the gospel. The gospel, or good news, is that God offers us His perfect righteousness as a free gift through faith in Christ because of what He has done for us on the cross. We are justified (declared righteous; made right with God) through faith in Him. Today we start out on a much more negative note: **the wrath of God being revealed**. Why does Paul begin with wrath? Because he is going to explain the good news in the next several chapters and in order to explain the good news, he first introduces the bad news. He must explain why we need the good news—why we need God's righteousness—and that is because we are not righteous. That's the bad news. We need justification because we are under condemnation as sinners. We won't seek salvation is we don't know we're lost. Only when we come to grips with our real and desperate situation before God as sinners do we rightly respond to the good news. So that's what Paul is doing in 1:18-3:20. He's proving the universal need for justification, demonstrating that every man (the pagan Gentile, the moralist, the religious Jew, everyone) are all under condemnation. In the portion today, his emphasis is on the pagan/Gentile.

The wrath of God is presently being revealed.

To start out, he says in verse 18 that **the wrath of God is being revealed**. Usually when we think of God's wrath, we think of his eternal wrath (the Great White Throne; being condemned to hell) or his eschatological wrath (the future Tribulation period) or cataclysmic wrath (natural disasters).[1] But here, Paul is speaking about God's wrath in the **present tense**. Just as the righteousness of

God *is being revealed* through the gospel today, so His wrath *is being revealed* today as well. We can all look around right now and see God's wrath and it's not exactly how most people expect to see it. We call it His **wrath of abandonment**—where He gives people over to reap the bitter fruit of their own choices (Judges 10:13-14; Psalm 81:11; Prov. 1:24-31; Hosea 4:17; Matt. 15:14). In Psalm 81:11 God says about Israel, *"But My people did not listen to My voice, And Israel did not obey Me. So I **gave them over** to the stubbornness of their heart."* The key words are: gave them over or turned My back on. His wrath of abandonment is when He removes His restraining grace and protection, and gives people over to their own self-destructive sinful devices that they crave. In the words of C.S. Lewis, He gives them over to enjoy the horrible freedom they demand and become self-enslaved. We'll see what that looks like later.

But to answer our question again, What is God doing today? Well, for one, He's revealing His wrath. Against what? **Against all ungodliness and unrighteousness**. Those might just be two references to sin in general, but we could think of the ungodly as those positionally without God and the unrighteousness as those who do not practice what is right. Why against them? Because it says, they willfully *"suppress the truth in unrighteousness."* Basically, they know the truth, but they reject it. They try to stuff it down and hinder it's effect upon them.[2] A suppressor on a firearm muffles the sound. That's what people do with truth and it's the cause of God's wrath. They want to muffle it, shoving truth in a box and sit on the lid and pretend like it's not there.

The cause of God's wrath: willful truth s<u>uppression</u>.

God doesn't go around striking people down immediately without warning at every sin. He reveals truth to them, and He waits patiently and graciously for people to respond. He gives them time to repent (Rev. 2:21; 9:20; 16:9). Wrath always follows a period a grace. But sooner or later, He must respond to the violation of His will and the lack of response to truth. And His response is just. What this means that there's no such thing as an atheist or agnostic (someone who says you can't really know God). The truth is that, like Paul says in verse 19, that which is known about God is **evident**, or plain, both **within them** and **to them**. *Within them* is a reference to the **conscience** (2:14-15). All men know in their heart and mind there is a God they are accountable too, whether they admit it or not. It's the reason "non-religious" people pray in a life-threatening situation.

The reason it's evident *within them* is because God made it evident *to them* through creation. Verse 20 says, *"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen."* I like that oxymoron. What's invisible is **clearly seen**. Paul is using here what apologists (defenders of the faith) typically call the teleological argument. It's the argument of, if something looks designed, then it must have had a Designer. When people simply look around at how orderly and complex and beautiful the created order is, they understand intuitively there is a Creator. They see the Creator's **eternal power** and **divine nature**. Basically, they understand someone who is not part of creation has the power to create it and sustain it. Someone is keeping this world spinning at just the right speed, at just the right angle, at just the distance from the sun, with a perfectly size moon at just the right distance. Someone painted that sunrise or sunset. It isn't an accident. It was designed to please the eye and glorify someone.

It's what we refer to as **natural (or general) revelation**. God reveals himself known through the natural, created order. There is enough knowledge in creation to appreciate God for who He is at a most basic level.[3] We know He exists. Knowing we were created, we also understand we are accountable to Him. There is right and wrong. There is good and evil. We reap what we sow. Natural revelation, however, is not enough to save people; they must hear the gospel as well—the **special revelation** of His Word. But natural revelation is enough to leave **every man without excuse** on judgment day. No one will ever be able to say, How was I supposed to know? The evidence was all around them 24/7. Psalm 19 says the heavens declare the glory of God 24/7. They are constantly preaching a silent sermon to everyone. So the sequence goes as follows:

1) God has <u>manifested</u> the truth about Himself to all men through creation.
2) Men <u>suppress</u> that truth in unrighteousness.
3) Therefore, all men are without <u>excuse</u>, being justly <u>condemned</u>.
4) Therefore, <u>all</u> men need <u>justification</u>.

When I was fresh out of high school, having lived long enough to know that doing life my way wasn't working out very well and that I better start seeking the Lord, a coworker gave me a book on creation versus evolution. And it was while reading that book in my deer stand and the author talking about the complexity of the human eye and the human hand that I started to see I was designed—I wasn't an accident. It was about that time I began to thank God for things. I remember taking my first buck with a bow and genuinely thanking God for that buck. It was a big milestone for me spiritually. Natural revelation—being in it while hunting and reading about it—was the first step for me in coming to an acceptance of the gospel. It made me think that this God is good. He provides. He's wise. And why would He create me if He didn't want a relationship with me? So natural revelation is often the first step towards the gospel. However, in most cases, the sad reality is that natural revelation ends up condemning man. Man suppresses the revelation and then perverts it. Paul elaborates how man makes an exchange:

21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their reasonings, and their senseless hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible mankind, of birds, four-footed animals, and crawling creatures.

So men, even though they know God, they don't give God the **glory/honor** He deserves. They don't give Him **thanks** either because if they do, that means He's the source of what they've received and are accountable to Him. As a result, man becomes a numbskull. Really, though. Man becomes **futile in his reasoning**s. He grows spiritually **dark** and **insensitive** to the things of God. Sin makes him stupid. In rejecting God, he rejects his God-given purpose and loses touch with reality. He loses purpose. He loses his mind. Instead of ruling over creation as God intended, he starts to worship it and serve it. He creates **corruptible gods** in his own image or the image of created things that will support his sinful desires and ideas. This is what you might call the *devolution* of man. Man did not start out as a puddle of cosmic goo and ascend to an ape to a man;

he started as the pinnacle of creation and has *descended* to a fool. **Professing to be wise**—inventing various philosophies and theories to try to explain life without God—**they become fools**. **They exchange the truth of God for a lie**.

Evolution is one of the lies and futile reasonings of our day, isn't it? It professes to be wise and scientific even though the evidence continues to point to a Creator and the global flood. You know, Charles Darwin trembled at the complexity of the eye. He also didn't have microscopes like we do. Michael Behe wrote a book called *Darwin's Black Box*. His black box is the cell. Darwin didn't even know the cell existed, let alone that it was made up of complex living machines. And because the more we study and the more we see complexity and order, evolution as a theory is hanging on by a thread today. The only reason it's still there is because it's basically legislated and if you go against the consensus as a teacher you're fired. But still, men want to believe this theory because if it's true, then man is not accountable to God. People will espouse anything—even false gods—as long as those gods support their sin and don't call them out on it. Many are starting to look elsewhere for answers though, claiming aliens brought life or there's an alternate universe or suggesting that the laws of the universe were different in the past.

II. THE C<u>ONSEQUENCES</u> OF GOD'S WRATH. (1:24-32)

24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things that are not proper, 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32 and although they knew the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also approve of those who practice them.

In response to people exchanging the truth of God for a lie, God **gives them over** (3x; progressively) to the consequences of their own sin and even further depravity. It's kind of like the Israelites when they craved meat. God sent them so much of it they were sick of it. Or when they worshipped idols. He basically said, "You like idolatry? Okay. Have it your way. I'll send you to the land of idols." He exiled them from the promised land. They forsake Him, He forsakes them (Judg. 10:11-14). It's what theologians call **the wrath of abandonment**.

The wrath of <u>abandonment</u>:
God actively, <u>judicially</u> gives people over to the increasing consequences of their own sin.

But even though it's sounds passive, like God's letting go, it's something that God actively does. Much like a judge hands a criminal over to the punishment of his crimes, so God hands over a sinner to the terrible cycle of ever-increasing sin and its consequences.[4] It doesn't mean that He makes people sin. They're already involved in it (Eph. 4:19). He's just giving them what they want. Like in the days of Noah, He says His Spirit won't strive with man forever (Gen. 6:3; 2 Thess. 2:7). He won't continue to protect man from himself. Sooner or later, He'll let the rope of His restraining grace out and let the current of sin take man deeper into where he wants to go, until he's drowning in his own sin. Notice the **progression** of each of the 3 stages in this passage. We should note that each stage has a **collective and personal** element to it. God gives individuals and societies over.

First, in verses 24-25, a society might be given over to sexual **impurity**. It might seem strange that Paul would go from idolatry to impurity, but this was typical. Paul wrote this letter from Corinth to Rome, two cities that were notorious for this sinful activity in connection with idolatry. Aphrodite was the goddess of love, beauty, and pleasure in Corinth; worship involved prostitution. Corinth was so reputable for this that they came up with a word for it. To "corinthianize," meaning "to practice immorality." It was a lust-driven society like our own. The human body is a wonderful thing God gave us to glorify Him with and to enjoy in marriage, but man tends to use his body for sin—following the lust of his heart—instead of for God's glory.

Then God, in verses 26-27, a society is given over to notice, "**degrading passions."** Even lower passions of homosexuality. Notice the unmistakably clear emphasis on male and female genders in the passage and it being called **unnatural**—contrary to nature. Only a male and female can reproduce. Therefore this sin highlights the depths of man's depravity in his willingness to reject such obvious truth. The truth suppression is so obvious and if you just look around, it wreaks havoc on their conscience trying to deny it. But because of this sin, it says they receive (as God's judgment) **in their own persons the due penalty of their error**. There's some debate over what that means but I think STD's like AIDS is a probable interpretation or other physical problems as statistics show. STD's are an example of God's judgement on that sin—not doing things God's way. It's similar to cirrhosis as judgment on those who abuse alcohol. Just so we don't think we're the only culture to experience what we are, we need to know that in the Greek and Roman cultures you might be considered strange for being heterosexual and monogamous. They, and many rulers especially, condoned all forms of impurity, including pedophilia. So nothing strange is happening. And paise the Lord we've been blessed for 2,000 years with a Judeo-Christian worldview in the western world. Unfortunately, we're obviously regressing back to that paganism.

The third wave of judgment in vv. 28-32 is the **depraved mind**. An unfit, unreasoning, loss of rational thinking mind. Paul gives an extensive list (vice list) of what a depraved mind looks like and it's basically, "Anything goes." There are no morals. Everyone does whatever they want without any fear of God, and they support each other in that rebellion.

It's clear to me that according to Romans 1, our society is under the wrath of God. It started with the sexual revolution in the 60's. Sex life was removed from the institution of marriage. Marriage became a minor option, and the marriage covenant became a conditional happiness contract. Not long after that, the homosexual revolution chimed in, coinciding with vv. 26-27. Today we're seeing the depraved mind of vv. 28-32 where people don't even know what gender they are. They are **proud of/boast in/give hearty approval to those who practice things that are improper**. We're living in v. 32, a verse that if I didn't know any better, prophesied Pride Month. People are applauding the rebellion against what is natural and God-honoring. If you try to call it sin, they claim you're being oppressive and speaking hate-speech.

The sad reality is that while people choose to go down this path seeking liberation and happiness, they can't seem to figure out why we have so many societal problems. They think if they have any problems in their pursuit, well it must be someone else's fault. Someone else abused them. They lack self-esteem. It's their environment. You can blame it on anyone or anything just as long as you don't blame it on sin—**suppressing the truth in unrighteousness**. You can suppress truth all you want, but it's still there and everyone knows it. Just because everyone else is doing it and the government says it's okay doesn't make the innate guilt go away or the anxiety with it. Suppressing the truth is hard on the conscience and hard on society. Relationships break down because we're not operating according to God's design.

I know this is bad news, but you never trust anyone who isn't willing to share bad news with you when you need to hear it. Imagine if your mailman said, "You know what? I don't want to deliver this bill to this house. I only want them to get the good mail." He'd be doing you more harm than good by not delivering the bad mail too. If your doctor knew you had a deadly disease but didn't want to make you cry so he didn't tell you, he'd be doing you harm than good as well. So it is with Paul in this section. He's delivering the bad news so that we will receive the good news. The wrath of abandonment isn't eternal. However, it is **anticipatory** of it, meaning it should be **reformatory** as well. It's to warn us that a greater judgment is coming if we continue to reject God. This wrath is designed to wake people up and make them realize they need repent and turn to Christ before it's too late (Eph. 2:1-10; 4:17-22). It's like a flashing lights warning us there's a cliff ahead.

The present wrath is <u>anticipatory</u> of eternal wrath.

It reminds me of the story about an antagonistic farmer and a rural church. The farmer owned a piece of land next to the local church and he got great pleasure out of working his field next to it on Sunday mornings, disturbing the worship services. After an abundant harvest one year he wrote a letter to the pastor of the church. In it he said that God could not exist because the farmer had deliberately gone against what the Christians felt were the structures of God, and yet look how he was blessed. The pastor wrote one line back to him: "God doesn't settle his accounts in October." And praise the Lord He doesn't because the scary thing about this passage is that we find ourselves in it. Certainly, we see in that extensive vice list some of the things that go on in our own hearts and lives. But that's the point of the passage: to prove we all need justification. We all need Christ. God's grace and wrath met on the cross of Christ. Christ suffered the wrath of God for us so we

wouldn't have too, now He offers us His righteousness as a free gift that we might be restored to God and become God-glorifying people again. John 3:36 says, *"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on Him."* Have you accepted the Son as your Lord and Savior or does the wrath still abide on you?

---

[1] John MacArthur, *When God Abandons a Nation*, https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-314

[2] William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 532.

[3] Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Romans* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2022), 53.

[4] Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 111.