

“GOD GAVE THEM UP.”

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Scripture Texts: Romans 1:24-32

Introduction.

In the first chapter of this great book of Romans Paul is carefully leading us to understand the Gospel he is eager to preach in Rome, the Gospel he is not ashamed of because it is the power of God for salvation to all who believe in Jesus.

But why do we need salvation? What are we in danger of that we need to be saved from? What cliff are we on the edge of, what ocean are we drowning in, what deadly disease has taken hold of our souls?

Its our sin of ungodliness in turning the truth about God into a lie, and our sin of unrighteousness exchanging the glory of God for idolatry, worshipping corruptible, immoral images in creation.

Against all of this the wrath of God has been and is being revealed from heaven. When we think about God’s wrath we generally have several misconceptions about it.

I try to correct the *first* misconception by adding adjectives to describe wrath, so God’s righteous wrath, God’s justified wrath, God’s pure and holy wrath.

There is no evil or vindictiveness or sin in God’s righteous anger. His wrath is nothing like ours. God said if we sin we will die, and we sinned and God in order to be just and holy must be true to Himself and His Word. The wages of sin is death. Death is God’s just judgment on sin.

Every death and our own impending death should cause all of us to take God seriously. We should especially do so when we see before our eyes the wrath of God so tangibly displayed.

Second, we generally think of God’s wrath as something coming in the distant future, at the great day of judgment. And that is true, but it is not only then. It has been on display since the Garden of Eden when God’s judgment came on Adam and Eve.

“Adam was made by God to keep the earth; when he rebelled against God, the earth was cursed to rebel against him. Eve was made by God to help Adam rule; when she rebelled, she was cursed with a rebellious spirit against his rulership. Satan was made to have authority in the heavenly places; when he rebelled by trying to get power in the earthly places, attacking its weaker ruler (the woman), he was cursed by being made lower than the earthly beasts, and being promised death at the hands of the woman’s seed” (Foster and Tennent).
Furthermore Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden and received the curse of death.

Our *third* misconception is we generally think the great judgment of God as involving terrifying upheavals, earthquakes, thunder claps and lightning bolts, hellfire and brimstone like fell on Sodom and Gomorrah.

We aren't prepared to hear that God's judgment on sin is sin, that He simply removes His restraints and lets us go our own way and do what we want to do, giving full reign to all our worst lusts and passions. The disordered moral and social corruption and wickedness all around us is the judgment of God. Everything that happens on earth is God's decree.

Every news show if it was honest should begin with the statement, "The fearful judgment of God fell today on the city of ... or nation of ..." "God once again gave men and women over to the lusts of their hearts, to dishonorable passions, to a debased mind."

The true God is actively judging us corporately, as a nation, and we will suffer God's judgment, punishment on sin, so Christians will suffer from the same judgment.

Before I move on to the third giving over, I want to clarify something I said last week when I said we exchange the truth of God for a lie when we say you can be a gay Christian, just not practicing it. That is a lie. To clarify, yes there are Christian who struggle with same sex desires and attraction.

The sinful desires and corruptions of our flesh remain in us even when we are saved and regenerated. They remain to humble us, and we must constantly be confessing and killing them through repentance and faith.

To identify as a gay Christian is to identify oneself by one's inner desire. Why would anyone do that? Since when do we identify ourselves by our desires, let alone our sexual desires?

To identify as a gay Christian or same-sex attracted Christian is seeking a different identity than simply Christian. A Christian is a repentant sinner.

We don't put other sins in front of Christian. Arrogant Christian, thieving Christian, murdering Christian, slanderous Christian.

We are all born in sin and oriented to sin and that never justifies sin. We don't talk about having a sinful lifestyle or orientation with any other sin, so don't talk about homosexuality in a way the Bible never does. Scripture calls it unnatural, perverse, effeminate, an abomination, disordered, in a word, sin.

In the words of Rosario Butterfield: "There is a world of difference between saying you struggle with same-sex sexual attraction and you are gay. One allows you to stand apart from your struggle, seeing homosexuality as a part of the Fall; the other collapses your identity into your struggle, seeing sexual orientation as a morally neutral reality."

We have been purchased and ransomed by the blood of Jesus which covers and cleanses all our sins. The grace of God enables sinners to forsake their sinful desires, orientations and practices.

1:28-32, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do what ought not be done.

This is the word of God speaking to us of why the world is the way it is and why our own hearts are bent and inclined the way they are.

Human beings are very naïve. When we reject God, when we ignore God, when we distort God and recreate our own images and idols, the fruit is way worse than we realize. And even worse yet, God joins us in our rebellion by handing us over to what we want, to our own destruction.

“You think you are free? You think you are casting off all restraints? OK, I will make you prisoners in your own freedom, I will make you slaves to sin and unrighteousness.”

The intent of the phrase is, “since they did not see fit to retain a knowledge of God, He gave them over to an unfit mind, a debased or depraved mind.” You can’t sin without consequences.

No one today says the condition our country is in is because of the judgment of God, and it is for the reason just given. They don’t have a knowledge of God, who He is and what He does. This is the fruit of a debased mind, without any knowledge of God you can’t see the judgment.

This depraved mind gave way to a whole host of unrighteous, ungodly sins, twenty one examples of them. All things that ought not to be done.

This is a picture of a person who has driven God out of his mind and heart and life, who hates God and wants nothing to do with God. When a man banishes God from his life, this is the sort of man he becomes. This is a picture of godlessness.

Now I know what you are thinking. Not everyone is like all these sins. We all know unbelievers who are decent, law-abiding, kind people. Of course, there are. And Paul knows that. Just like Paul wasn’t saying all unbelievers have homosexual desires.

This list shows the downward spiral of the path when you reject God. The more we suppress the truth and exchange God for lies and idols, the more God will hand us over, and the more He hands us over the deeper we will go into these sins.

Paul starts the list with unrighteousness which sounds like the genus of which all the rest are specific species. Then he lists several comprehensive sins for the depravity and wickedness all human beings are filled with.

Then he piles up words describing the ways we break human relationships and destroy each others’ reputations with a hateful desire to harm others. It spirals deeper to those who are haters of God and inventors of evil, those who apply creativity to evil. Think politicians, Hollywood, porn producers, Silicon Valley, San Francisco.

Disobedience to parents makes several lists in Scripture. It is serious because it is a sin that ruptures the relationships in the home which is the foundation of every society and culture. Sin starts in the home.

Paul finishes the list with four strongly worded negatives.

Foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Senseless, faithless, loveless, merciless.

Without brains, honor, love or pity.

Heartless, stifling the most basic of human feelings, a mother's love for a child.

Ruthless, without pity, merciless, like the Gentile world that descended into the worst depravity, cheering mobs applauding the violent deaths of humans in the Roman Colosseum.

Are we any different, sitting in our living rooms or on our computers watching all manner of sin, debauchery, violence, sexual immorality, perversion, degradation, vile things. Watching what ought not to be done. How often have we laughed at some breaking of the Ten Commandments?

This list is meant if nothing else to show us how foul and ugly and demeaning and debased sin is. There is nothing beautiful about this list. To the extent any of us do any of these things we ought to be ashamed. It isn't pretty. Who can defend any of this or excuse it as OK?

To sum it up. This is a picture of what happens when you take the God who created this world and us, the God who holds it all together, and you take Him out of the picture.

You want to know what happens when a culture rebels against God, this is what it looks like. You want to know what happens when you rebel against God and reject and ignore God, this is what it looks like.

This list is a list of the battle fields of a person who is at war with God. And some people are fighting on multiple fronts. This is a picture of that war with the truth, that war with the knowledge of God. But to do battle with God is a fool's errand.

The only hope against the wrath of God is repentance. The only hope is to make peace with God, to surrender before it is too late. Too declare a cease fire by coming to faith in Jesus and accepting God's righteousness.

Vs. 32, though they know God's decree they do them and approve others doing them.

Paul closes with the ultimate statement of a debased mind, of a depraved soul.

This is Paul's punchline, the conclusion of it all. Four statements.

They know. There are no true atheists.

They know those who do these things deserve to die.

Knowing this they continue to do them.

Not only that, but worse yet, they give approval of the evil behavior in others.

Notice God says they don't do these things out of ignorance. They are sinning against their conscience, against their inner sense of what is right and wrong. Out of that sense of right and wrong they have a sense of justice, and therefore know what is wrong deserves to be punished.

God Himself who knows all human hearts knows what we know. Despite our rejection of God and the darkening of our understanding, God knows we know the righteousness of God, the righteous decrees or ordinances of God. Meaning according to God's ordinance they know those who do these things deserve to die.

Their efforts to suppress the truth and the knowledge of God didn't and doesn't work. They don't want to know God, but they can't help know His judgment.

The depth of their sin and wickedness doesn't stop there, it goes deeper. They don't just do these things, they commend, encourage others to do them. Sin loves company.

What is the greater evil, to do something that is evil or to encourage others to do something evil?

A person who sins could plead they were tempted and fell into sin, in the passion of the moment. But a person who encourages others to do evil is another depth of intentionality. They are carrying the rejection of God to a greater level. They not only destroy themselves, they encourage the destruction of others. They create a culture, a society in which things that ought not to be done are accepted and approved.

A man who feels shame for his sin has hope, but a man who shamelessly encourages others is without hope.

Today we see now yet a further step of evil. Not only acceptance and approval, but silencing unacceptance and disapproval. You are not allowed to express or even to hold a contrary opinion. You will be canceled and demonized.

The promotion of evil in our nation is staggering, the promotion of homosexuality, transgenderism, gender confusion and dystopia, drag queens, promoting sexual immorality in school curriculum, defending and promoting and protecting killing babies.

All of this is the judgment of holy, true righteous God we worship. America thinks it has chosen abortion and sexual immorality. No, it's not a choice, it's a curse because of the hatred of God, the rejection of the truth, the exchanging of God for idols.

Implications and application.

No nation on earth has ever survived from banishing God from its midst, from hating God, from exchanging God for idols and godlessness. The great Roman empire fell, and great was its fall.

No nation and no person have survived turning its back on its Creator and sustainer. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

We live in a world clearly under the wrath of God. We are experiencing His judgment first hand. God is removing His restraining grace, He is giving us over to our own sinful desires and choices.

Paul wants all of us to be deeply convinced and convicted about our sin and that there is in us no good, no righteousness, no excuse and no escape. We cannot point the finger at those other people who do all those terrible sins, and say “I thank God I am not like them.”

This shows us the importance of the gift of shame. It is God’s grace to us. Shame is God's schoolmaster leading us to repentance and faith in Jesus—the only Savior of sinners.

Paul is out to destroy all pride, and to humble us under the truth of God’s Gospel. Our only hope of salvation and righteousness is in God’s righteousness which is revealed in Christ Jesus.

Glory to God salvation belongs to Him and His Gospel is His power for salvation and in the midst of our sin-saturated, rebellious world the worst sinners have hope in the saving blood of Jesus.

There is only one power that can overcome all the evil wickedness of sin in the world. There is only one truth that can overthrow this great lie. There is only one light that can dissipate such a great darkness.

All the great and powerful emperors of the greatest empire on earth couldn’t save them. All the greatest and wisest Greek and Roman philosophers and teachers couldn’t lead them to the truth.

Paul has taken us into a dark tunnel and we can’t yet see the light at the end of the tunnel but it is coming. We are on the Roman road and there is hope ahead.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 7:24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Romans 8:1-2 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.