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January 5, 2020

Back to Basics

Romans 1:18-32

Prayer: *Father, again I just, as I've said, this is something that I believe you have put on my heart, this series that we are about to undergo, and as I've said, this is a difficult thing, this is not an easy series to undertake. It's reflective of the circumstance that we find ourselves in culturally at this point and so I want to pray for an extra measure of grace, an extra measure of insight and wisdom as we go through this that you would guide, direct and bless us. It is your word that is the rock, it is your word that is solid. We praise you and thank you for it. So we pray as we open up your word that you would give us the ability to make it of lasting value, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, like I said, there's no question we are living in perilous times, and I think many of us think that we're either on the brink of war externally or perhaps even civil war internally and for good reason. Many people wonder where God is in all of this. And for a number of years now I've looked at the way that things are going and found myself stating over and over again it's Romans 1

unfolding. And so at the beginning of this new year I thought we would take the time to look at just what God is telling us through this very difficult but enlightening passage that I think describes the source of the cultural struggle that most of us are aware of and why it seems to be intensifying.

Let me just read to you the entire passage. This is *Romans 1:18-32*. It says: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable*

passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

What an encouraging way to start the new year. Well, I wouldn't blame you for thinking is this guy nuts, I mean, you look at this and you see three times in this passage God is describing the consequences of what happens when a culture turns away from him. And so three times we see this statement "God gave them up," "God gave them up," "God gave them up." God's punishment for a rebellious culture is to simply give them up. To what? We'll find it's to their own insanity. I believe we are witnessing the unfolding of this punishment. I believe that we are under the

wrath of God. But believe it or not, there's also a great deal to be encouraged about in these scriptures. For one thing God is telling us exactly what the cause is of all that is swirling around us so that we no longer have to guess why our culture seems to be going off the rails. And along with this understanding of why we're going where we're going is the understanding that God gives us solutions to each of the reasons why we, as a society, are being given up.

So let's start at the beginning. Things seem to be slipping more and more out of control in terms of not only the way people act but collectively the way governments act as well. Common sense and common decency appear to be disappearing. We've seen big cities overrun now by homeless encampments that defy city codes with impunity. We've seen videos of people who are zonked out and shooting up drugs right on the street while law enforcement has no choice but to just watch. We've even seen simple hygiene give way to political correctness at the risk of diseases like typhoid and plague returning, and no one seems to care.

You know, when I was in India years ago I was blown away by the fact that I was in a country that had nuclear weapons and still did not seem to grasp the concept of indoor toilets. And on more than one occasion I saw people simply relieving themselves on the street

and I was absolutely incredulous. That was about twelve, thirteen years ago and today in our major cities this has become standard practice. I mean San Francisco has so much human waste on its streets that it now hires people specifically trained to remove it. But local government, it seems, either will not or cannot do anything about it. And the same is true when it comes to simple laws about property theft. I mean it's been virtually decriminalized in many major cities. Christopher Rufo who was a contributing editor of *City Journal*, he writes this, this is about California:

California's Proposition 47, approved by nearly 60 percent of voters statewide in 2014, reclassified many drug and property felonies as misdemeanors, effectively decriminalizing thefts of \$1,000 or less. Many criminals now believe, justifiably, that they can steal with impunity. For example, in San Francisco, police reported 33,000 car break-ins last year; the city now leads the nation in overall property crime. In Portland, a repeat offender nicknamed the "Hamburglar" stole \$2,690 worth of meat in one year. He bluntly told police officers: "I know the law. I know the rules. I know what I can do and can't do. I'm never going to get over \$1,000 at any store." The Portland Police Department, which doesn't assign officers to retail theft cases, admits that official statistics vastly under report actual crime.

This is not to say that this kind of insanity is confined to the West Coast. Here on the East Coast we're about to see enacted a brand new approach to criminal injustice. And it's understandable, I mean, people have recognized for the longest time that the wealthy have an advantage over the poor when they get arrested and that bail is something that a wealthy person can almost always manage to come up with while a poor person is forced to use bail bondsmen. These are folks who charge extraordinary fees or exorbitant interest rates, and there's no question that there is an iniquity there, but the solution according to New York State is to drop the bail requirement for almost every kind of crime there is. The District Attorney's Association of the State of New York has released a list of charges that will no longer qualify a suspect to be held on bail, *WTEN* reported. I'm just going to give you a couple of them: assault in the third degree, aggravated vehicular assault, aggravated assault upon a person less than eleven years old, criminally negligent homicide, aggravated vehicular homicide, manslaughter in the second degree, unlawful imprisonment in the first degree, coercion in the first degree, arson in the third and fourth degree, grand larceny in the first degree, possessing an obscene sexual performance by a child, promoting a sexual performance by a child, failure to register as a sex offender. This is just a list, there's dozens and dozens more of these. These are infractions that are no longer going to require bail if

you get arrested for them.

And so the question remains, if a person is going to be released after being accused of committing these infractions, what is going to induce them to come back for trial? Well, CBS News reports our local government's solution. This is *CBS New York*. They say: *There's a controversy ahead over new criminal justice reforms. Cash bail will be eliminated January 1st for hundreds of offenses and some defendants could be let out earlier and given rewards to show up to courts, BDS2's Lisa Rozner reported. State judges will no longer require cash bail for most misdemeanors and non violent felonies like selling drugs or burglarizing a home, and the state says nearly 900 city residents in jail now will be released starting mid-December. A law enforcement source told CBS2 a city program will offer those released incentives meant to encourage them to show up in court such as Mets baseball tickets, a subway pass or a Dunkin' Donuts gift card.* I don't know if you need more of a description of what insanity is. I mean we seem to be a culture that's fracturing not just on the outer edges but in the heart of the legislative process. And so we start to wonder, how in the world do we arrive at a place that's as bizarre and as bleak as this? And I've said it in the past and I'll say it over and over again, it is Romans 1 unfolding. And I honestly believe if you understand what God is telling us in Romans 1, you will have a

better handle on understanding exactly what is taking place in our culture today.

The first chapter of the book of Romans contains a section explaining what happens when a culture begins to go off the rails. It describes exactly why God's wrath is revealed, what the wrath looks like, and how we can respond to it. I mean we know that God is absolutely sovereign, we know that nothing takes place outside of his control, and we also know that God has ample reason to be unhappy with our country and with our culture. And so this morning I want to break down just what it means to be a culture under the wrath of God. And before you start thinking I'm some prophet of doom, I want to describe first what's going on in the way Romans 1 describes it. It says: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.* It's pretty obvious, Romans 1 obviously has to do with the wrath of God being poured out. The problem is going to any description next of the wrath of God is that anyone describing that kind of thing becomes guilty by association of kind of wanting to promote a God of wrath. Believe me, that is the last thing on my mind and heart. I mean I want nothing more than to tell you about the overwhelming love of God but I have to tell you that genuine love also contains wrath against those things that would hurt the beloved. I mean if someone for no reason attacked your son and daughter and you

responded with a shrug of the shoulder, people would have a genuine right to question the love that you have for your children. I mean it's expected that a deep love would be a protective love designed to promote the best for the beloved, and yes, that would include a righteous indignation towards those who would do your beloved harm. Well this morning I want to illustrate how the wrath of God is rooted in that very same love and explain to you just what God's wrath means in the context of Romans 1 particularly with regard to the way our culture is going.

As I said, Romans 1 describes three different accelerating levels of wrath that God pours out on a culture that has turned away from him. And we're only going to have enough time to cover one of those today. We'll cover the first expression of wrath today and we'll follow up on the next one in the following weeks. And so the first thing we have to ask today is why? Why do we experience God's wrath? Well, God very clearly gives us the reason for his wrath being revealed when he says that, he says: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* You should put your finger on that because this is incredibly important, folks, this is the big sin. This is the sin behind virtually all other sin that God judges us for. You see it's one thing to reject or rebel against the truth. It is another

thing entirely to see the truth at some level, to understand the truth, but then decide that you're going to put all of your energy not into complying with the truth or simply rebelling against it but in suppressing it. That's the reason why there's this, the crime behind all of the crimes that God is speaking about. And the reason why it is the crime behind all crimes is that it cuts off even the possibility that you can experience that truth, repent and change course. Jesus said, "*You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*" And if it's the truth that can set you free and you are actively or for that matter passively suppressing that truth, well then you've made it impossible to ever find the freedom that Christ is speaking of for yourself or for anyone else that you're suppressing that truth from. And there's nothing that this world needs more desperately than truth. And this is the ultimate truth that we suppress. You see, the entire world is suffering a terminal disease that started in the Garden of Eden. It is called the fall, it is called original sin, it is an inherited disease. It's one that you get from your first parents, Adam and Eve. It is a disease that kills 100 percent of those afflicted by it and 100 percent of us are afflicted. The prophet Ezekiel made it clear when he said in *Ezekiel 18: The soul who sins shall die*. And we all sin, so we all die. As George Bernard Shaw put it: "The statistics on death are very impressive. One out of every one dies." Jesus came specifically to address the disease of death

that all of us are afflicted with and he put it this way in *John 10:10*, he said: *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."* You see, every one of us is afflicted with this disease and Jesus alone has the cure. Now imagine how God feels towards those who are committed to preventing that cure from ever reaching your ears. These are folks who are committed to suppressing the truth. And that's why God says when he says what he says, when he says: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* God then goes on to detail exactly what truth he is speaking about and how it is suppressed. He says this: *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.* What God is saying is this is as basic a suppression of the truth as you can get. He says God is obviously clearly invisible, but he makes himself known through things that are clearly perceivable, things like trees and clouds and stars and mountains and oceans and fish and birds and mammals, all of which serve as pointers to God as creator. And because there are so many of these pointers and because they virtually surround us, God is making the case that our ignorance of his existence is inexcusable.

God rhetorically is asking us how can you stand on my earth looking up through my air through my trees at my clouds to my stars and conclude that instead of me as their author that these things were instead actually created by nothing. I mean if you found a laptop and concluded anything other than a designer had designed and executed, you'd be laughed at for ignoring the most obvious of evidences. I mean you'd have a really tough time convincing anybody that the parts simply manufactured themselves and then arranged themselves in such a way as to produce a laptop, and yet that's precisely we do with the things that God has made that are infinitely more complex and complicated than any laptop.

So the reason why God's wrath is revealed from heaven is because mankind is not simply making an honest mistake and misidentifying the author of creation, rather the conclusion man reaches is an obstinate rejection of overwhelming evidence staring him right in the face. And along with that comes the willful decision to suppress the truth in order to convince others that in fact all of creation is not the product of God's invisible attributes but simply an accident of nature. Again the scripture goes on to say: *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.* Well, God's conclusion is stunningly obvious, I mean, he says anyone who's surrounded with such obvious

proof of God's existence knows deep down in their hearts that there has to be a God. I mean he says -- quote -- he says: *Although they knew God* -- God is stating categorically that they, which is ever single sentient human being who's ever been born, they knew who God was by virtue of his creation. *"But"* -- quote -- "they simply refused to honor him or give thanks to him." What God is saying here is this is not a matter of the intellect. This is a matter of the will. He goes on to say: *Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.* So God is saying is when faced with overwhelming evidence of who I am, you chose instead to worship the things I've created instead of myself as the creator. And whether it was birds or animals or creeping things or even your fellow created human beings, you chose them to give worship to thinking that that made you wise. In fact it made all of you fools. And again we have to look at this from God's perspective. Understand, God knows the absolute truth. He knows he is the creator and sustainer of the universe. Now imagine that God seeing eagles or lions or snakes and lizards held up as the actual creator worthy of honor and worship. I mean the reason why God calls such people fools is because only a fool would give that honor and worship of creator to one of his fellow creatures. And worse still is the human foolishness that Isaiah describes as he describes how we go about

making our false gods. Listen to what he says in *Isaiah 44:14*. He says this: *He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. And he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!" And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!"* I mean it's as if God finds this so stupefyingly foolish that he only -- all he can do is just describe it and let its absurdity speak for itself. God is describing someone whose desire to reject the real God is so strong and so powerful that he will go with anything of lesser value simply to ignore the creator who is obviously due the worship.

I mean God really defines what a fool is in *Psalm 14:1*, he says: *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."* You see it's the desire to preclude or exclude God that drives the desire to embrace false gods, and here's how we do that today. First we have to look backwards. For centuries man was forced to seek out an alternative to God in manmade items made of wood or gold or in images of men or

women or birds or animals or crawling things, anything, anything to avoid the real God. But then a little over a hundred years ago science delivered the ultimate false god. We call this god "naturalistic evolution." And again, first of all, we need to define some terms here 'cause it's incredibly easy to get confused. Let me just explain to you what I mean by "naturalistic evolution." Naturalistic evolution is the claim that all things have evolved by chance from nonliving organic chemicals. It insists that no one and no thing designed or directed it and that evolution is solely responsible for every living thing in creation. I mean the term "evolution" itself is incredibly misleading. I mean every creationist I know of believes in micro evolution, but none that I know of accepts the idea of macro evolution. No thinking Christian denies that animals can experience profound changes over time. We call that micro evolution. We call that natural selection and it's quite obvious that the environment can make intra species changes that are profound but that is not and never will be evolution.

Allow me an aside for just for a moment for a little mini science lesson. You probably have heard of this, but for years and years the greatest proof of evolution was called the onset of industrial melanism in England. Basically what happened was at one point in time there was a certain type of moth that had a population that was primarily speckled. 98 percent of this -- these moths in this

population were speckled. Only two percent of them were just about black. Well, this was during the industrial revolution in England and as time progressed and the industrial revolution progressed in England, the population shifted so that the majority population of these moths was no longer speckled but almost all black, and it was extraordinary. The population did a 180-degree flip. Folks for years and years said this is the greatest living proof that we have of evolution. A speckled moth has evolved into a black moth. Folks, that's not evolution. It is properly called "natural selection" and it's something that virtually everybody agrees on. I mean to put it simply, the speckled moths used to blend in perfectly with the mottled trees in the forest that they sat on and as the trees grew dirtier and dirtier during the industrial revolution, more and more speckled moths started to stand out and got picked off by birds. Now again, there was always a small percentage of this moth that was born not speckled but almost black, and those moths, because they were almost black, wound up blending in with the new color of the trees so much better that they got to grow old and make babies. All that actually happened was that the population dynamic had shifted from a minority of black moths to a majority of black moths simply because the environment had changed enough so that the black moths got to survive long enough to breed while the lighter moths got picked off. Now if you went to public school, you probably have heard

this described as the greatest example there is of evolution. It is not. It is natural selection. It is micro evolution. And no matter how hard you try, you can breed an insect a million times, it will still remain an insect. And what Christians on the whole reject is macro evolution, the idea that one species of animal can turn and evolve into another species. There's enough variety with the species of dog that you can breed out both a pitbull and a Chihuahua but you can breed a dog a thousand times over a thousand years and you will never get it to turn into anything other than a dog, and that's exactly what the idea of evolution is based on.

And I've mentioned before on numerous occasions, I've said that evolution is clearly a secular religion and that any attempt to challenge it even by thoughtful atheists is met with a fierce and oftentimes vicious response. There's a reason why people are so passionate about believing in evolution. It's the one scientifically approved false god that now allows folks to exclude the real God from his own creation. I think it was R.C. Sproul who pointed out the name of the new god of the 20th century, the god who's responsible for creating virtually everything and all of creation is a god who now goes by the name of "no thing" or "nothing." I mean if the key to naturalistic evolution is that it is random, undirected and unsupervised, that it is entirely driven only by random chance and vast oceans of time, well then in other

words, it's a process overseen by no one and nothing. So who created the plants and the trees and the flowers? Nothing. Nothing also made the mammals and the birds and the fish. This is our 21st century substitute for the way people rebelled of old by worshiping gods of wood, gold, and stone. Now we reject God by worshiping a god who represents in every way nothing. And God says you can only arrive at that conclusion by actively suppressing a truth which is so obvious that every tree, every bird, every fish and every blade of grass demands an explanation for why they're here. And claiming that nothing is the source of their creation is even more foolish than cutting down a tree, carving it into an image and then worshiping it. Again God says: *Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. And served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. Therefore God gave them up.*

Again I want you to note very carefully that statement: *"Therefore God gave them up."* It occurs three times in this passage in Romans and it defines the insanity that seems to be gripping us as a culture. You remember the entire passage that we're reading, it is about the wrath of God being revealed. And remember how the passage begins. It says this: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who*

by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. Okay. The offense that causes God's wrath to be revealed, the why, so to speak, of God's wrath is the suppression of truth about who God is and what he has done. The how of God's wrath revealed, however, is not what you would expect. I mean people think of the wrath of God as revealed in earthquakes and famine and disease and the like, but God is very clear here that he expresses his wrath in a unique way for the sin of suppressing his truth. You see those who decide that they have no interest whatsoever in truth are abandoned to the lies they've grown to desire instead. God gives these people up to their own folly. Three times in this passage you'll see the statement "God gave them up," "God gave them up," "God gave them up," and in each case it represents the escalating and finally ultimate punishment of God which is the removal of divine restraint. It is God simply saying, "You want nothing to do with me. As punishment, I will give you what you are asking for, and you will find it in an accelerating way the folly of your own reasoning." That's how God gives up people.

And the first giving up is stated quite clearly. Listen to it. It says this: *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed*

forever! Amen. God is telling us what's going on here. He says God gave them up to lust, impurity, and the dishonoring of bodies. I can sum all of that up in one word that has gone from the darkest of back alleys to the front row seat now at our culture's dining table and that word is pornography. It is precisely the dishonoring of bodies. A decade ago it was hidden and shameful, consigned to the outer margins of society. Today it is celebrated to an extent unimaginable a mere decade ago. I mean, porn stars today are mobbed for autographs at award shows like the Oscars, designed to reward the most imaginative and new ideas in debauchery. It's been said America's answer to shame is shamelessness, and we can say that it's never been more apparent than today. I mean, porn is touted as a form of liberation but it is anything but. It is in fact a judgment of God.

The National Center on sexual exploitation says this: "Pornography is a social toxin that destroys relationships, steals innocence, erodes compassion, breeds violence, and kills love. The issue of pornography is ground zero for all those concerned for the sexual health and well-being of our loved ones, communities, and societies as a whole." They then go on to cite just a slew of statistics, and I just picked some -- there's more than 20 of them, I just picked a number of them that are appropriate. These are just astounding. Number 1: 64 percent of young people ages 13 to 24

actively seek out pornography weekly or more often. Point number 8: 35 percent of all Internet downloads are porn-related. And point number 11: At least 30 percent of all data transferred across the Internet is porn-related. Point 16: Porn is a global estimated \$97 billion industry with about twelve billion of that coming from the U.S. Point 17: In 2018 alone, more than 5,517,000,000 hours of porn were consumed on the world's largest porn site. And point 20: The world's largest free porn site also received over 33,500,000,000 site visits during 2018 alone. I can cite reams and reams of statistics all decrying what pornography is doing in our culture, but apparently people don't care, at least legislatively they don't because God has given us up to this.

Well, interestingly enough the organization I just cited as well as some of the more popular ones, they're not even Christian. The National Center on Sexual Exploitation and "Fight the New Drug" are secular organizations that are recognizing the havoc that pornography is wreaking on our culture. But here's what I want you to understand, because it's critical to grasp what God is telling us here. Pornography is not the cause of the wrath of God, it is the effect. The crime that has elicited God's wrath is not pornography, it is suppressing the truth. Because we suppress the truth, God is taking his hands off us and we, on our own, have made pornography -- quote -- "the dishonoring of bodies among

themselves" as one of the centerpieces of our culture.

So what do you do if you're caught up in pornography? How do we avoid the pitfalls so many have fallen in, and if we have fallen, how do we get out? Well, you know, God has an answer. Listen to how apropos this statement is. This is from *Romans 13:12*. He says: *The night is far gone -- he's describing us, our culture. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immortality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. Make no provision for the flesh.* In other words what God is saying is don't make it easy to fall. When I counsel folks, I often use the term -- folks that are caught up in this, I often talk about firewalls. And a firewall is something that you build to escape from getting caught on fire. I mean oftentimes folks say, "I got caught up in the heat of the moment. I didn't have the strength to resist." And we say, "Okay, let's find a place where you do have strength, and right there, let's build a firewall." I mean I mentioned before my own experience with pornography was in college. In those days it was *Playboy* and *Penthouse*. The house that I lived in had subscriptions to both. I mean when I got saved, I put that stuff away but I

found I couldn't get those images out of my mind. I would go to worship, I would go to pray, I would go to communion and there was always those images. Do you think God conjured those images up? So I prayed and I prayed and I sought God's grace, and I treated porn then like I treat it now, like it is a highly contagious infectious disease that will kill you. And in time those images disappeared. So I learned then about firewalls. And like I said, if a store had a *Playboy* or *Penthouse* or those kind of magazines in aisle 5, I wouldn't go to aisle 4 through 6 just to make sure I didn't get near that stuff, because I knew it was radioactive. That's what a firewall does. I mean I've met with lots of folks about issues like this, folks who feel they're losing the battle with Internet porn. The first thing that I tell them, sins like this flourish in the darkness, but they diminish and die in the light. And yeah, it's painful. But the light is what it needs. Listen to *Ephesians 5:11*. It says: *Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*

So if you find yourself in this kind of situation, bring it into the light. Talk to us, talk to a trusted brother or sister.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed and you will find the power of this sin diminishing. I mean we will not condemn you because Christ doesn't condemn anyone who is willing to confess his sins. It says in 1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So I encourage you to be forthright about it. There's one thing that I can guarantee you, you will not shock me. I've been in this business for a long time. I think I've heard everything there is to hear. Trust me, you will not shock me.

And if you remember just a few weeks back, we started speaking about adding to our faith, and one of the things that we added to our faith was self-control. And self-control is actually giving control of yourself over to the Holy Spirit. It's a fruit of the Spirit. And if you remember, there's only one way that you can grow this fruit. You grow it by growing your relationship with Jesus. Jesus said: *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."* You see, the more you abide in Jesus, the more precious that he becomes to you, the more you see pleasing him as a greater pleasure than even the guilt-filled pleasures of pornography. It is only the growing love for Jesus that gives you the desire to place the control of your body under

the control of his Holy Spirit. So you have to have both. You have to have an internal and external drive to conquer this sin. Internally it's got to be your love for Jesus, externally it's got to be recognizing a need for accountability. I mean one very potent way to make a firewall, to make no provision for the flesh is through accountability, and that means letting someone else know of your struggle, someone you can be accountable to. So if Internet porn has captured you, you need to back up where you still have strength and make a firewall there that includes accountability, and it might mean getting rid of your computer, even your smartphone. But you have to ask yourself is your freedom from slavery worth that? And for others it may be as simple as moving the computer to a more public place, maybe enlisting the aid of an Internet filter or an accountability website such as covenanteyes.com. This is an organization that for a small fee will hold you accountable to someone else by sending them monthly reports on what it is you are viewing. Your accountability partner receives a monthly breakdown of the sites you visited rated by their sexual content. I went on it just the other night and covenanteyes.com, they have over 20,000 positive testimonials of folks who said just knowing I was accountable gave me the strength to defeat it. Again, God says, make no provision for the flesh.

You know, a number of years ago I was discussing this aspect with

one of my sons, and he protested to me, he said, "But you don't trust me." And I looked right at him and I said, "You're absolutely right, I don't trust you." I said, "guess what, when it comes to this stuff, I don't trust myself." I said, "you have no idea how powerful a monster you are up against." And I pointed out that when I counsel members of the opposite sex, I always make sure someone else is present, and if I make no provision for the flesh, then why wouldn't my son?

So how about you this morning? Are you feeling what Solomon felt when he embraced the pleasures of illicit sex? Understand, Solomon had 800 of the most beautiful sex partners gathered from all over his kingdom. You know what Solomon said? Solomon said it wasn't enough. I mean today, thanks to the technology of the Internet, what is a pitfall that only kings like Solomon could fall into is now virtually available to anybody with access to a smartphone. Solomon had it all, and he said it was empty, he said it was meaningless. He said it was a chasing after the wind. He found that sexual pleasure, like all other pleasures removed from God as the source of pleasure is like cotton candy, you know, it appears to have substance, appears to be solid and as soon as you put your teeth into it, it just melts away and disappears. Well, if you've been sucked in by the cotton candy of porn, God still promises you he has a way out. God left heaven itself and he came to earth as a

man like us and then he lived the life that we were supposed to live, and the difference is he lived his life perfectly. And then he went to the cross to lay that life down as a perfect payment of his righteousness for our sin. And having done all of that for us, he's not about to leave us in this battle with no resources. And so if you feel helpless to fight because that monster is too big and too strong, God says you are mistaken. And I can prove it from scripture. He says in *1 Corinthians 10: No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide a way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.* We may be that escape that God is speaking about. And so if you hear God speaking to you in that scripture, speak to me, speak to one of the elders. God promises that he will provide a way out, he will provide a way of escape. Let us help you find it.

I think it's indisputably obvious that God has given our culture up to impurity, to the dishonoring of our bodies. But again, I think we have to understand the root cause is not pornography itself but rather the suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. And hopefully we've seen that God doesn't leave us without resources even at that point. So next week we're going to do communion, but the week after that we'll look at this second level of God giving us up and

even then you will find God will always have an escape, he will always have a solution. We got into this mess by suppressing God's truth. We will get out of this mess by re-embracing it, as Jesus put it: "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." Let's pray.

Father, again, as I said at the outset of this message, this is a hard message. This is a difficult passage. These are difficult times that we are living in, I mean, day after day we learn new things that are even more shocking than the day before. And Lord, we just look around at our culture and we can be easily dismayed but Lord, when we see and we understand that these things are unfolding exactly as you said they would, it gives us hope. And when you tell us that you have a way of escape for each and every one of these things, that gives us hope anew. And so, Lord, I just pray today if any of us in this room are suffering and under the thumb of pornography, I pray that you would give them the courage to just speak to someone, speak to someone trusted, speak to a friend, speak to an elder, share that burden, bring it out into the light, let God show you the strength, the grace, and the power that he can bring to free you from this slavery. And I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.