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The Recipients of the Wrath of God, Part 3

Romans 1:18-32, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ 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. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ 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.

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ 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.

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to ^adebased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness,

evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.³² Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.¹

Is it True?

Did you know that the society we live in has been greatly shaped by a question? We fly airplanes because this question was asked. We drive cars because this question was asked. The light bulb, the phonograph, and the computer all exist because of this question. What is this question? "Is It True?"

Thomas and Orville Write, Henry Ford, Thomas Edison and Blaise Pascal all entertained magnificent theories. And yet all of these theories would have perished with the death of their inventors had they not asked the question, "Is it true?"

"Is it true?" has had an incredible effect on our lives, and still has an incredible effect on our daily living. Your response to a report on

- Cancer.
- Cholesterol.
- AIDS
- Exercise.
- The financial future of our country.
- Natural disasters.

Your response is all determined by the answer you give to the question, "Is it true?"

Today, we are faced with this question. Paul has just established the fact that all men are the recipients of the Wrath of God- including those who have never heard the Gospel. Now the natural response to this and the one which Paul anticipated here is to ask the question: Is It True? Is God's wrath really against the one who has never heard?

Our section is the answer to this question. It tells us that God's wrath is NOT just a theory, BUT is real- for it is being worked out in our world today of which Paul gives three examples! Now don't misunderstand God's wrath as seen today in the world is wholly in part. Yet those manifestations of God's judgment are but a foretaste of the wrath which someday will be directed against all outside of Christ.

With this, let's look at this passage and discuss the reality of the wrath of God. We see it first in all non-Christian Religion.

Their Rejection of God, v. 25.

Romans 1:25, "For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the

¹ The Holy Bible : English standard version. 2001. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

creature rather than the Creator."

This is almost a repeat of what Paul said in verse 23, yet there are a couple of noteworthy differences. The phrase "for they exchanged the truth of God for a lie" uses the word for "lie" here has an article and is thus more accurately translated as "THE lie." And what is "THE lie" here in reference? The lie of idolatry, it is the chief of all lies!

Notice "they exchanged the truth of God for THE lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator." As we have said, Gentile worship is not a partial truth. Rather it is "THE lie" that leads people away from the truth of God. The Gentile in his religion is not seeking to serve God the best way they know how. Rather, their religion is an attempt at fleeing from God. They worship the idol as a means of emancipation from the calling and demands of God.

Idolatry Described

It is difficult to fully understand the gravity of this without an understanding of the sin of idolatry. This text calls idolatry "THE LIE" for good cause for it is the root from which springs much if not all evil fruit. So many of us think idolatry is the kneeling before visible objects of worship. It is much more subtle. As Tozier put it this way:

Let us beware lest we in our pride accept the erroneous notion that idolatry consists only in kneeling before visible objects of adoration, and that civilized peoples are therefore free from it. The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. It begins in the mind and may be present where no overt act of worship has taken place... Wrong ideas about God are not only the fountain from which the polluted waters of idolatry flow; they are themselves idolatrous. The idolater simply imagines things about God and acts as if they were true. (Tozier, 1978, pp. 11-12)

This is what makes Idolatry such a horrible sin for it involves two actions: First, the devaluing of God and secondly the exaltation of man and ultimately Satan.² The exact things that Paul attributes to the non-Christian in their passionate pursuit away from God. Now because of this rejection of God, the non-Christian reaps the judgment of God.

The Consequence of Idolatry

Romans 1:24, "Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity."

In essence, God handed them over to their sin. This is a judicial act! Now this "handing over" is an interesting phrase which raises an important question: If the non-Christian is dead in their sin³ how can they be given over any more to sin than they already are? Dead is dead, right? Let's answer this question.

² Compare 1 Corinthians 10:20

³ Compare Ephesians 2:1-3

In the present age, sin is described as a "passing pleasure."⁴ Yet in the age to come, when the judgment of God is full and the non-Christian is left in his sin in hell, this state is described as a horrible place where, "...worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." (Mark 9:48)

What's the difference? What is it about our age that makes sin pleasurable? God's presence and grace! In the present age God's grace, among other things, is a preservative. It keeps the world from being as bad as it possibly could be!⁵ Therefore it is only the grace of God⁶ that keeps the sinner from experiencing...

- The destructive force of sin.
- The Hell that sin will one day merit!
- The weeping and gnashing of teeth that always accompanies sin!

In light of this we conclude that God in His wrath at times gives the sinner over to his sin; free from His preserving and protecting grace, to experience in a very limited sense, "Hell on earth."

Judges 10:13, "Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will deliver you no more."

Psalms 81:11-12, "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, to walk in their own devices."

The Psalmist speaking of the rebellious people in the wilderness said this:

Psalms 106:15, "And [God] gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul." [KJV]

2 Chronicles 24:20, Zechariah the priest said, "Thus God has said, 'Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord and do not prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, He has also forsaken you.'" ⁷

In fact so common does God do this as a means of discipline when it comes to the sinner that Solomon "principlized it" recording it as a Proverb.

Proverbs 5:22, "His own iniquities will capture the wicked, and he will be held with the cords of his sin."

See, God is not passive but active when it comes to man's sin! Accordingly the temporal judgment of

⁴ Compare Hebrews 11:25

⁵ It is God's grace which (1) enables us to conduct ourselves in "holiness and godly sincerity," 2 Corinthians 1:12, (2) enables us to exercise the spiritual gifts we have received, Rom. 12:6; 1 Corinthians 1:4ff; 1 Peter 4:10, (3) Gives "joy" in the midst of trials, 2 Corinthians 8:1-2, (4) Enables us to have all of our needs "sufficiently met," 2 Corinthians 9:8, (5) Enables us to glorify Christ, 2 Thessalonians 1:12, (6) Gives us "eternal comfort" and "good hope," 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, (7) Gives "help in time of need," Hebrews 4:16, (8) "Strengthens and establishes" us even in the midst of incredible suffering, 1 Peter 5:9-10.

⁶ Compare Mark 9:48; 1 Corinthians 15:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 and Romans 2:5-6

⁷ Compare also 2 Chronicles 15:2; 1 Samuel 8:7-18, 19-20

God during this age in which He allows the sinner to reap to a greater degree the fullness of his sin serves both a positive and negative effect. Positive: God gives people over to their sins that they might repent.

Isaiah 19:22, "And the Lord will strike Egypt, striking but healing; so they will return to the Lord..."

Paul commanded that the unrepentant sinner be handed over to Satan "that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." (1 Corinthians 5:5) Hymenaeus and Alexander were delivered over to Satan "so that they may be taught not to blaspheme." (1 Timothy 1:20) And this section⁸ is written for the very purpose of leading people to the Gospel.⁹

So God hands people over to their sin in order to humble them and bring them to Himself. Yet there is another reason that God gives a person over to their sin. Negative: God gives people over to their sins as a foretaste of the divine judgment that awaits them if they do not repent.

Luke 13:4-5, "...do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."¹⁰

As Christ saw temporal acts of destruction as divine foretastes of the wrath to come, so we too ought to see God's abandoning of a person to their sin as a foretaste of the future eschatological judgment of God upon all peoples! As a temporal act of judgment; and so a labor pain/a reflection of the final judgment, God gives people over to their sin. Notice specifically that to which God hands the false worshipper over.

Romans 1:25, "God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity."

The impurity spoken about here primarily refers to an impurity of a sexual kind¹¹ Historically, sexual perversion at some point accompanies idolatry. It is to this that God delivers a person when it comes to their religious attempts as fleeing from the Lord. Dr. John MacArthur put it this way when he said this:

[Sex] has been part of religion in the past even in the NT era of pagan religion. That's always had a high level of appeal. Look at Islam. You can be a Muslim and have multiple wives, and you can die. And waiting for you if you die in a jihad are 72 virgins on green pillows waiting for you to have eternal [relations] with them. (MacArthur, 2010)

Such is the proof and evidence of the judgment of God against the non-believer. His religion is defiled.

The Result

Romans 1:24, "That their bodies might be dishonored among them."

⁸ Compare Romans 1:13-3:20

⁹ Compare Romans 1:17; 3:21 and Genesis 6:5 and 1 Peter 3:20

¹⁰ Compare also Jude 7

¹¹ Compare 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:7

To dishonor means to degrade, treat shamefully, or treat with no respect¹² It can refer both to physical harm and emotional bruising. And what is it that is being dishonored? The bodies. To say that the body is dishonored is to imply, especially in this context, that their body is physically abused! No doubt Paul is referring here to the practice of ritual prostitution which was all but universal in idolatrous systems of the 1st century, and which, like in our day, resulted and results in gross physical abuse.

So is the wrath of God as described in Romans 1:8. Consider the focus and state of non-Christian religion and it testifies to a withholding of preservative grace whereby the sinner is given over to their sin. From this we conclude that the idolatry of the Gentile not only incurs the wrath of God, but it reflects it! God could have preserved the fallen world in which we live from any and all idolatry. Yet He doesn't. Accordingly, to behold idolatry is to know that God's wrath is real!

And yet it is not simply in the realm of their religion. We see the reality of God's wrath in their relationships.

Romans 1:26, "for this reason."

This is referring to v. 25 and the non-Christian's rejection of God in favor of the idol! Now on account of this rejection, notice their reward.

Romans 1:26, "God gave them over [judicially, He withheld His preserving grace and so abandoned them] to degrading passions."

Literally this means passions of dishonor. Note at the outset that whatever these passions are, Paul tells us with force that they are...

- Disgraceful in character.
- Wholly corrupt.
- Without any shred of decency!

What are these "degrading passions?" The word Paul uses for "passions" is closely associated in the New Testament with sexual lusts. From this we conclude that Paul once again is discussing corrupt sexual desires but this time in the context of their relationships.

Romans 1:26, "for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural."

Literally this reads that they are doing "that which is against nature." This is clearly referring to homosexuality. Homosexuality is an act which totally contradicts the way God made man. And yet that is not strong enough for the verse before us is even more emphatic. Notice that the New American Standard Bible deletes a very important word here, "even." The text should be translated, "for even the women..." Thus we take this verse as saying, "Their sexual desires are so corrupt that even the women have been affected." Hodge put it this way:

Paul first refers to the degradation of females among the heathen, because they are always the last to be affected in the decay of morals, and their corruption is therefore proof that all virtue is

¹² Compare Luke 20:11; Acts 5:41; and James 2:6

lost. (Charles Hodge, April 15, 1994, p. 42)

Romans 1:27, "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..."

Once again, the New American Standard is a weak translation here. More literally it could read, "carrying out acts of shamelessness." This is a strong expression which indicts the abominable sin that homosexuality is to God. Why is homosexuality so abominable to God? According to Ephesians. 5:32, the male/female union was created to reflect the relationship that Christ has with His bride, the church. Truly, this relationship of redemption represents a large part of the purpose and focus of God in creation! Thus to reject this created order is to reject NOT merely an insignificant part of God's plan for this world. It is to reject God Himself, His Kingdom, His Glory, and His Plan! There is no neutrality here. With that we are brought to the results or the consequences of their sin.

The Result

Romans 1:27, "receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error."

The idea here is very close to that in Galatians.

Galatians 6:7-8, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life."

See, God will not be mocked. You cannot reject God, rebel against His authority, and then expect Him to protect you from the consequences of your sin. If a person rejects God, they will justly receive as a necessary payment for their sin the consequences of your rebellion in their person (physically, spiritually, and emotionally). And what would that include? The consequence of the homosexuality spoken about in this verse would include, but not be limited to all the horrible consequences of this life-style...

- Physical mutilation.
- Emotional duress.
- Sickness.
- Disease.
- Guilt.
- And yes, even AIDS.¹³

From all of this we see that there is an awful wage to pay when the non-Christian rejects God and gives

¹³ In fact in our politically correct society, the following data is not very popular, but it's accurate. Though less than 2% of the US population is homosexual, in 1992 eighty three percent of US AIDS cases among whites occurred in homosexuals. The average life-span of the practicing homosexual is: male population is 42, female population is 45. If you're a homosexual male you have an 87 times more chance of being murdered than the average heterosexual US citizen and a 25 times more chance of committing suicide. (quoted in "Medical Consequences of What Homosexuals Do" by the *Family Research Institute, Inc.*)

themselves to sin. Their relationships bear it out such that we conclude that God's Wrath is Real! Again, the Gentile's sinful, fallen relationships not only incur the wrath of God, but they reflect it! God could have indeed preserved the fallen world in which we live from any and all sexual sin. Yet He doesn't and hasn't. Accordingly, to behold the fallen relationships of man is to know that God's wrath is real! And yet it doesn't stop here. Notice one more area where God's wrath is seen today...

Faulty Reasoning

God's wrath is seen in their reasoning by their rejection of God.

Romans 1:28, "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer..."

The idea behind "see fit" involves a test which has as its objective the proving of the quality of an object. The idea is a test that establishes the worth of someone or something. The implication here is that the non-Christian's rejection of God stems from a conviction that God is not worthy! Worthy of what? Worthy of being acknowledged.

Romans 1:28, "to acknowledge God."

Failing to "acknowledge God" is to conclude that God does not measure up to what you want in a god, and therefore you want nothing to do with Him, His worship, His Kingdom, His Glory, and His honor. Now for this flagrant act of rebellion the non-Christian once again undergoes judgment from the hand of the Lord.

Their Reward

Romans 1:28, "God gave them over [judicially, He withheld His preserving grace and so abandoned them...] to a depraved mind."

The word behind "depraved mind" was originally used of coins that were discarded and so viewed as worthless because they didn't stand the test (they had too much impurity). And so to be depraved is to be tainted, disqualified, and/or defective when it comes to use. Here it is in reference to their mind and thus their conscience.¹⁴ Accordingly a "depraved mind" refers to a mind that is unable to evaluate what is good and bad. Their conscience has ceased to work properly such that they commit horrible sin.

Now don't misunderstand this passage. Paul is NOT saying that on account of the Gentile's rejection, God makes their mind depraved- the fall did this.¹⁵ Rather, Paul is saying that on account of the Gentile's rejection, God withholds His protecting grace and allows the Gentile to suffer the results of their depraved mind! And what are these results?.

Romans 1:28, "...to do those things which are not proper."

Because the morally defective mind has been abandoned by God, it has no foundation upon which to make decisions. That is why once again idolatry is always accompanied by gross immorality and error. In

¹⁴ Compare Titus 1:15

¹⁵ Compare Romans 5:12; Ephesians 2:3; 4:17-18

fact, notice that to which they are abandoned is a destructive path.

Romans 1:29, "being filled with all."

The abandoned Gentile is not half-hearted when it comes to sin. In fact if you learn nothing else from this verse, learn that when God abandons a sinner to his sin, the sinner receives a full taste of it! Accordingly, Paul piles word upon word to convey the idea of complete abandonment.

Romans 1:29-31, "Being filled with all unrighteousness [this is a generic term which easily summarizes the rest of this list], wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife [which is a quarrelsome disposition], deceit, malice [that is, conscious and intentional wickedness; the intent to harm]; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent [which refers to a lofty sense of superiority from which a person treats all others as beneath him], arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil [a man given over to their sin will invent new and improved ways to rebel against God], disobedient to parents, without understanding [that is, without insight into moral or religious things], untrustworthy, unloving [that is, 'without natural affection' when it comes to their children. A mark of depravity is the consumption of one's children for one's sin], unmerciful."

Truly when the non-Christian rejects God, God gives them over to a defective mind. And the result is that their whole manner of life becomes destructive! That is why Paul writes this:

Romans 3:10-12, 16-17, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good... Destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace have they not known."

Yet, that's not all. When the non-Christian is abandoned by God, their abandonment and so God's wrath is seen in a destructive opinion.

Romans 1:42, "And although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death."

This is a repeat of vv. 18-23. The witness of God in creation again is effective. All people in all places at all times know that God is and that as a King He is owed certain obligations which if withheld will result in the sinner's death.

Romans 1:42, "they not only do the same [as evidenced in vv. 28-31], but give hearty approval to those who practice the same."

Justifying one's sin is wicked enough, but to encourage others to sin is immeasurably worse! Yet that is where the non-Christian when he suffers a judicial punishment from God and so is handed over to his sin. Don't miss it. Even the best societies have had those within them that are blatantly evil. But a society that openly condones and defends evil has reached the deepest level of corruption. Thus David observed this:

Psalms 12:8, "The wicked strut about on every side, when vileness is exalted among the sons of men."

This is why we must be very careful about referencing an endorsement on the part of man as the basis for our activity. It is easy to gather around oneself supporters for almost any sin. No! We must be word-driven and so word-based. If God's word doesn't teach, support, encourage, or endorse it, we must know that we are in the wrong no matter who is numbered among our supporters!

And so see that the sinful activity of a people, tribe, or nation not only incurs God's wrath, but it reflects it. This is why it is silly to say, "If our nation doesn't repent, God is going to judge it." Look around brothers and sisters. The sinful actions of our society testify to the judgment of God which already is set against this land!

With this we conclude that God's wrath against those who have never heard the Gospel is real! When the non-Christian reaches a certain point in their rejection of God, God gives them over to their sin, minus His preserving grace! The RESULTING physical, moral, and spiritual destruction are evidence of God's righteous condemnation!

Now, how do we respond to all of this? We all should see from this text that the wrath of God is real! One of the tendencies as sinful people is to minimize or forget the reality of God's wrath and judgment. Such will be the mindset of many in the last days.

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3, "For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape."

The passage before us cries out against such a mentality. The description it gives of the temporal manifestation of God's judgment hits too close to home to allow us to sleep. In fact, look at our society and tabulate the activities it encourages and which God hates. It is shocking. Our society encourages...

- Adultery.
- Divorce.
- Pornography.
- Homosexuality.
- Fornication.
- Lying.
- Witchcraft.
- Personal Vengeance.
- Drunkenness.
- Murder.
- Idolatry.
- Etc.

In view of our passage, the only conclusion that can be drawn from all of this is that God's wrath is real! It is being worked out before our eyes this day. It assuredly is coming tomorrow!

Now based on all of this, we must see that the message of "Peace and Safety!" is a lie! And we do the greatest amount of damage to ourselves, our family, our church, and our world when we allow this message to be OUR MESSAGE- whether it be by the sermons we preach or the sermons we live!

Indeed, we of all people must be ones who boldly stand, as did the prophets of old, and sound the warning that peace and safety is a lie, and that destruction and misery lay in our path if we do not turn!

Oh let us be faithful in

- Bringing this message to the world.
- Sharing of the coming wrath of King Jesus against all evil-doers.
- Telling of the hope that is in Christ...

Oh non-Christian, did you know that because of our sin, God became a man, lived a perfect life, and then died on a cross in our place? If you will rely upon Christ's sacrifice, God will forgive you? Go to Christ this day.

And yet, we must also be ones who ourselves are living in light of this passage! You see, having been freed from the wrath of God it is so easy for us to

- Forget the seriousness of sin.
- Allow sin a foothold.
- Down-play it.
- Justify it.

And that is why in view of the coming wrath of God the universal call throughout Scripture is to live unto the Lord...

2 Peter 3:9-18, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. 11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! 13 But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. 14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, 15 and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, 16 as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. 17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness, 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."

Don't miss it. A consideration of the wrath of God is sobering. For on the one hand we are confronted with the awful truth that God is offended by man's rebellion and sin. It isn't a joke. And yet on the other hand we realize that in many ways we are just as guilty as the non-Christian when it comes to the

sins we commit.

So what are we to do? As ones saved by the blood of the Lamb of God we are brought to three extremes from this verse.

- Great Trust, 2 Peter 3:14. Praise God that we have a Savior who died in our place on the cross. It is only His sacrifice which makes us acceptable to God. As such though the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), we know that in Christ there is therefore now no condemnation (Romans 8:1)!
- Great Passion, 2 Peter 3:11-12, 17-18. Knowing that it is on account of sin that the wrath of God comes AND in love with Christ, we do not want to sin... not even just a little. Accordingly, we become a people consumed with holy living, obedience, and Kingdom service (as reflected in 2 Peter 3:11-12).
- Great Longing, 2 Peter 3:9, 18b. We don't want to live in a world where God's authority is taken lightly and His kingdom rejected. As such, we labor diligently at destroying speculations and lofty things raised up against the knowledge of Christ.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on February 28, 2010. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.