

2022-03-06-Bless Others By Thinking Rightly About God-MB

Bless Others by Thinking Rightly About God

Romans 1:16-32

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Matt Bohling

If you've not met me yet, I'd like to meet you. Some of you I've had the privilege of meeting. I'm Matt Bohling, and the Session has asked me to come as an interim preacher and a consultant to them these next months, as you are in the middle, between pastors. We're going to work through a series while I'm here on two Sundays a month on the attributes of God. I'll talk about that, why that is helpful and important a little bit after I read our text.

Our text this morning if you've got a Bible, I expect some of you might open the screens or something like that, is from Romans chapter 1. So, we'll be in Romans chapter 1, verses 16-32. Let's hear what God says through the apostle, Paul:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it (the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

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. [ESV]

In the congregation I led in West Seattle, at this point, I would say, 'This is the Word of the Lord.' And you would say, 'Thanks be to God.'

Let us pray together. Father, this is both a very heartening passage of scripture, for you tell us here that you have focused your power in a beautiful, glorious message of mercy. And you tell us why we need it, why we, your people, need it. For we do these things when we suppress the truth about you. Would you move in us that we wouldn't. That instead we would receive you as you reveal yourself to be, that we would worship you, that we would center you and bless, bless others, as we rightly think about you. Help us now even as we meditate on this. Work in us, Holy Spirit. We pray in Jesus's name. Amen.

I apologize. My voice is deeper than usual. It's been a long week of talking. I've gotten to spend a lot of time with a lot of you. It's been very wonderful, and you all can pray that I have enough voice to finish. It is great to be here. I'm very much looking forward to regularly preaching, helping, working with the staff and the session as CPC transitions to the ministry of, what I pray will be, a new, long-term lead pastor. As I said, I'm here two times a month, we're going to make it through a series on the attributes of God. As so, as I said that, probably some of you were like, hmm. And others of you were like, 'Yes!'.

I suspect no matter your reaction, you're going to be surprised by the way I do this series. Certainly, when I did this series in my congregation in West Seattle, they were surprised. So let me address both of those groups, the excited and the disappointed. For the excited, expect to be challenged, to move from a theoretical knowledge of God to one which moves your heart away from sin and towards people. And for the disappointed, who perhaps desire something that's encouraging, practical, life changing, expect that this series, Lord willing, will be all that. And that it will be challenge you to think more deeply about God. That you might sense His love and thus love Him more, and thus love those around you more, as a result. Recognize that this is the Biblical pattern, right.

We're told the Biblical pattern in 1 John 4:19. This is the Biblical pattern or flow of love. This is the way that God tell us it works. 1 John 4:19, we love because... Okay, we're going to have to try that one more time. Okay. So, you'll find out over time that as I preach, it is more like participatory theater, reverent, participatory theater. It's the word of God. I preach it the way that it is, but the idea is that we're interacting together. I'm leading you in interacting over the word of God.

So, we're going to try this again. 1 John 4:19. We're going to spend a lot of time in this verse and the thoughts around it, in due course. We love because...*He first loved us*. That's fascinating. The degree that you find yourself capable to love others is the degree to which you have received the love of God. We will spend several sermons on the love of God, and we'll dig into it a ton, because it's so key. Today our objective is more modest than that, although this is a big chunk of Romans 1, the second half of the chapter. But really, the sermon's only got one point though I have four.

Bless Others By Thinking Rightly About God

1. *See the Gospel as the center and solution*
2. *Grieve our truth suppression*
3. *Understand God's response to us refusing reality*
4. *Bless others by thinking rightly about God*

It's only got one point. Why is it so crucial that you know God? It's so that you can bless others. They're linked inextricably together. And so hopefully by the end, you'll see that. What we're going to be learning in this series or learning in a more full way is: Who is it that has loved us? Friends, it's not too much to say that all of the major problems in the world, from Ukraine to the struggles between people groups here in the States and abroad, even the pride and envy in your heart and mine. All of it flows from not being completely overtaken by a profound and life changing knowledge of God.

That knowledge of God, that kind of knowledge of God, issues forth in a certain kind of life. We'll learn. A life of resounding, even raucous, thanks, that is apparent in its orientation outward to people and away from self. And so that's why we start here. We start in Romans 1, that we might learn how to bless others by thinking rightly about God.

You can see there's an outline in the bulletin, and I'm an outliner. So, if you take notes, I guarantee you, this is not enough space. You'll get used to that about me. I do preach off an iPad. You're always free to ask to see my notes. There is no guarantee that you'll be able to understand them. But you can always ask for them if you like. That won't offend me.

So, let's first see in verses 16 and 17. See the gospel as the center and solution. God, through Paul, says, 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel.' Single gospel. The gospel, the message of love and salvation through Christ. The call to repent and believe. Why? It's the power of God for salvation. It's the power of God. God locates his power the way that He acts, in life-changing ways in people's lives in the gospel. It's what Paul always returns to. And not just, he says, for salvation. And if you take the entirety of the book of Romans, what you learn is that salvation is past. I was saved. Salvation is, so justification if you like fancy language. Salvation is I'm being saved. Sanctification, right. I'm progressively becoming more like Christ. Salvation is future glorification, right. The life of the world to come. So salvation in three tenses and the gospel is the power of God for that.

To those who believe. For everyone who believes. To my people first. To the Jew and also the Greek. That's all of you, the collection of Gentiles. Why it's there that God's

righteousness is shown forth. His righteousness in demanding that sin be paid for, and that righteousness be lived. But also, the granting of it to us, in Christ, a great exchange from 2 Corinthians 5:21. And that's from faith to faith; that all the way through, it's by faith, because that's the way we're called to live. Now, Paul starts there and then he, it seems disjunctive. There's a paragraph break in most of your Bibles, paragraph breaks for stuff that humans have done. So, it may or may not be good, right, all right. So, what problem does the gospel solve? What problem does the gospel solve, at least initially? The beginning of our Christian life. Verse 18, for the wrath of God is revealed.

Sometimes people have trouble with this, that God's wrathful. We don't have much difficulty with humans being wrathful with other humans when we feel justified in that. But we have problems with God being wrathful. Why is God angry about sin? It's the same reason you get angry about sin. People disrespect you. You feel anger towards them because you feel hurt. You feel worthy of respect. They don't think you're worthy of respect. You feel hurt. You feel angry towards them. It's not more complicated than that. Righteous hurt results in righteous anger. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. This is a very important phrase for Paul in this passage.

You can think about it this way. Maybe you've played water volleyball before in a pool net in the middle, right. Somebody's that, and you know it's kind of joking between points. And somebody's taken the volleyball, and they sort of hid it behind them and pushed it under the water, right. Where's the volleyball? I don't know. You know where it is? I don't know where it is. And they suppress the truth. They push it down, try and make it invisible. So why is God hurt, and thus angry, even wrathful, of our people's sin. It's our, it's my truth suppression. It's your truth suppression. And so, let's then.

Second, I told you we're going to move quick: grieve over, grieve our truth suppression. Look with me. Keep going there in verses 19 and going. So, what are we suppressing? Well, we're suppressing true knowledge about God. For what can be known about God is plain to them. It's plain to people because God has shown it to them. What has He shown? His invisible, His invisible attributes, namely His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived. They're obvious if you look.

I like the NPR news quiz. On Saturday mornings typically is when it's shown on stations. And one of my favorite, maybe my favorite category of all time. Kind of a trivia buff. Don't hold it against me. Maybe my favorite category of all time is things you should have learned in school. Anybody know how to finish that? Had you been paying attention. Things you should have learned in school had you been paying attention. And this is what God is saying. Not paying attention. You're pushing the volleyball down. They've been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world. That's actually exceedingly important. That phrase. Well come back to why it's exceedingly important in just a little bit.

Ever since the creation of the world, and the things that have been made. So, you're meant to see the stars. Now after living 13 years in Seattle. Great. 12 of them were awesome.

I now live in Cour d'Alene, Idaho, where it's actually dark. And so, we walk home from my mother-in-law's for dinner sometimes on Sunday evenings. That's where my family will be tonight. And we walk back on a dark road, and we look up. And we see the Milky Way. The heavens declare the glory of God. The things that have been made.

And what's the result of that? Because God has revealed Himself in these limited ways, showing His eternal powers by nature. People, all people, are without excuse? Why? For although they knew God, verse 21. That's generally not personally, but they knew God was there. They didn't honor Him as God. They ignored Him. As they ignored Him, they didn't give thanks to Him. As a result, their minds and their hearts begin to shrink and become less functional. They come, become, futile in thinking. Their hearts are darkened. Though they claim to be wise, they became fools. I'm a big fan of the ESV Study Bible. If you don't have one or access to one, I commend it to you. I'll even buy you one if you ask me. That's how much I think it's helpful to the vast majority of Christians. You'll hear me quote the ESV Study Bible, because it puts Biblical truths in simple, helpful forms that commentaries don't.

Here's what the ESV Study Bible says about verse 21: *The root sin is the failure to value God above all things, so that He is not honored and praised as He should be. Human beings are foolish, not in the sense that they are intellectually deficient, but in their rejection of God's lordship over their lives. They knew God not in a saving sense, but they knew his existence and his attributes. Claiming to be wise, they became fools.* Now what happens when people do that? Verse 23. They exchange the glory of the immortal God for images, for substitutes, resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. You can think of the forties in Isaiah if you want to get more on that, particularly Isaiah 44:9 and following. They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal men and birds and animals and creeping things.

We tend in our culture not to make idols that are metal. This is a ESV Study Bible little quip. We don't tend to make idols that are metal. We tend to make ones that are mental. Though we may not make physical idols and bow down to them, we certainly center other things in our lives than God. Coming to live as a Christian, to live in that pattern of daily repentance and faith, is to grieve my own truth suppression. My, as Don Carson puts it, my 'de-god-ing' God. By considering him unworthy and instead, seeking to manage my own life, by sinning. So, I'm asking you to join me in repenting of truth suppression, of 'de-god-ing' God, of centering other things than God in our lives. Have you done that? Have you begun doing that? Walking, turning from managing your own life with sin, that turning away Christians call repentance. And are you turning to Christ and saying, 'I can't get this done. I need you Jesus.' And is that your daily pattern of life? Is that the way that you live?

Well, it's obvious from this passage here that God radically dislikes our truth suppression. That's why his wrath is being revealed from heaven. So just as we have an understandable response to people who disrespect us. So does God. That is an understandable response to being disrespected.

And so, let's then, third, understand God's response to us as we refuse reality. Look at verse 24. Therefore, because men had refused God, disrespected Him, turned away from Him, therefore, God gave them up. This is the first of three or four instances, I think I forgot, at least three instances of God giving them up. Here's God's attitude. 'All right. I made you. I know what's best for you. I know what's best for human community. You can, I mean, you can go your own way if you want to. I'm just telling you it's going to be bad news, but I'll let you. I'll let you go your own way and suffer the consequences. Fine. Have it your way, but it's not going to be good.' So, God gave them up in the lust of their hearts to impurity. Man exchanges the glory of the immortal God for images. God gives people up to that which they think can satisfy them but never can. And He gives them up. The lust of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves. Again, study Bible: 'all individual sins are consequence of the failure to prize and praise God as the giver of every good thing.' I'll read it again because it's really good. 'All individual sins, every single one of them, are consequence of the failure to prize and praise God as the giver of every good thing.'

And then God goes through this really sad list of sins that we're going to trip our way through very, very quickly. But I want you to see that they are all the consequence of not first prizing and praising God as the giver of every good thing. God gave them up in the lust of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves. Why? Why did God do that? Because they exchanged. This is the general principle. We do this exchange. They exchange the truth about God for a lie that can very well be translated the lie. The truth about God for the lie. And what do people do when they live in light of the lie? They worship and serve the creature. They take something that's been made, and they center it. And they say that will make me happy. That's it. That's the critical, central truth. People put something in the middle of their life, and they say this. How would you answer that question? I would really be happy if... And all you have to do is fill in the blank. And that is the thing you have put your trust in. What you put your hope in. What you believe can bring you satisfaction. I would be happy if... and that's what you've centered. That's what you've exchanged for the glory of God. That's the lie. You're believing the central, the core lie, is that something that is made can fully satisfy me. But it can't because you were made for the Maker, not for something that He made. So, there's this critical distinction between God and the things that he made. And we tend to center something that He made. So, we worship and serve the creature, something in creation rather than the Creator who is blessed forever. Amen.

Well, what does that look like when people say, 'No, I'm going to suppress the truth about God, and I'm not going to live in light of Him being the One who made everything. I'm going to exalt my own wisdom. God goes okay. Sadly, He gives them over and He gives them over to what's in their heart to do. And he gives them over. We go through verse 26. To dishonorable passions. Women exchanging natural relations for those that are contrary to nature. It's important to say here that because there's a Creator, there is a given-ness to creation. There's a design to creation. And what God's saying here is that people, when they exhibit sexual activity that is not according to His created pattern, that it's contrary to nature. Notice that He does point this out, but He doesn't just point this out. As we keep going this is a mistake that sometimes Christians make. Paul does point this out, but he's actually going to point all of us

out by the time you get to the end. There's lots of ways that we center something other than God that we think can make us happy. Sometimes, it's a particular kind of sexual relationship. So, God gives them over to dishonorable passions. Their women exchange natural relations for those that are contrary to nature. The men do the same. They give up natural relations with women. They are consumed with passion for one another, committing shameless acts with men receiving then the due penalty for their error. Not just that. That God give people up to. Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God. See there's the key thing: to decenter God, to de-god God, God gives them up.

This is the third one: to a debased mind, right. They became futile in their thinking, verse 21. He gives them up to a debased mind, to do what ought not to be done. Well, what are those things? They were filled. When we center something other than God, we are filled with all manner of unrighteousness. What I'd like you to see here really carefully is: look at all the damage that is done to ourselves and to the people around us when we decenter God, and we put something else at the center. When we put something else at the center, what we think will make us happy, I want you to see how much it damages the people around us. Notice all the people damage here. God gives them to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness, gossip, slander, hating God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventing evil, disobedient to parents. Yes, that's a big deal kids. Foolish, and adults if you don't honor your parent in their old age, that's a form of disobedience to parents. We're awful at this as Americans. Let's just admit it. Disobedience of parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. All of those sins are the decentering of God and the centering of something else that I think can make me happy.

Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them, but they give approval to those who practice them. It's fascinating. In Sunday School this morning in Bill Sciannella's class, we're looking at 1 Corinthians. This is the thing that Paul points out, right. You're even approving this. All right. Well, there's a lot that could be said at another time about many of these sins. Today at least God pointed out to me in the 1 Corinthians passage. What's a reviler and are you one? And I don't know. I think I need to go learn more about that. The reason my voice is harsh is because I use my voice a lot this week. It's one of my key problems. Well, much could be said in another time about many of these sins. For now, I just want you to notice how damaging it is. This is part of the reason why God gets upset at sin. It, sin, not only offends God. It, not only, disrespects Him. It, not only, says 'No, you're not wise. I'm wise. I know what's best for me so I'm going to center something else than you.' Sin, not only, offends God, but it damages us. And it damages other people.

God's way is what we call not sinning, doing righteousness, obeying the law, whatever way you want to put it, God's ways are compassionate. Because He knows how humans and human community works best. Because He is the Creator. To say it again but in a different way, all sin flows from people like you and I refusing God. Yes, maybe, perhaps overall, God doesn't exist. I don't follow God. I don't want anything to do with God. Yes, perhaps overall. But recognize that every sin that I commit, and that you commit. In that moment you decenter God.

You put Him over here and say, 'There, there.' And you say, 'No, this, this will make me happy. This will make me satisfied.' I say this because I want my own repentance to be deeper. And I want your repentance to be deeper. That we say that to God, in our repentance, 'I again, Lord. I thought something that you made could satisfy me when it never could. I'm made for you, only you can satisfy me. Forgive me for Jesus's sake.' That's a very different kind of repentance. 'And oh, I did a bad thing.' You might not refuse God overall, but you certainly do, and I certainly do, in the moment.

This is worthy of your meditation friends, to ask yourself: how am I refusing God? Or what about God am I not acknowledging when I sin like X. How am I refusing God or what about God am I not acknowledging when I sin like X? Now there I use the 'M' word. So, we'll just get this out of the way in the very first sermon. How's that? You will hear me encourage you to meditate. Meditate on the Bible. Meditate on God's character. Numerous times in this series. So, get used to it. I will encourage this practice of Christian meditation, of rolling around in your minds. In this particular case, a truth about God that I learned from the Bible. Sometimes when I encourage meditation, people come to me and they say, 'Oh no, I can't do that. I don't do that.' And I'm like, really. I would kindly challenge you that everyone meditates. Everyone rolls certain things around in their minds. Everyone. I've been rolling around in my mind the wonderful third version of the iPhone SE, being released this week if you hadn't heard. The eighth. There's a thingy on the internet you can watch. I can give you the link. I can, my wife reminds me, center my life on electronics that I think can finally satisfy me. And it's no wonder then that I'm disappointed all the time. Everyone rolls certain things around in their minds. Their own insecurities. The hurts that other people have done against them. The fears that they have. The things they wish they'd accomplished. The mistakes that they've made. Everyone rolls certain things around in their mind. Friends, it's simply what you roll around.

Well, if you consider that sin is refusing God, perhaps you can understand God's response to us in refusing reality. The wrath of God revealed from heaven, and friends, this is what makes the gospel such an amazing message. The very God who by all rights could just write us off as rebels. Fine. Have your own way and just walk away, and no one could blame Him. No one can blame God for just walking away. That's not what He does. Instead of writing us off, writing us off as rebels, He solves our problem. He solves our 'de-goding' Him, our decentering Him, by sending his own Son to accomplish this righteousness of God that we started with in verse 17. The Father sends His own Son to accomplish everything, to walk perfectly, to never decenter His father, but to always live in knowledge and love and response to His father. That's what Jesus did for us. That's the righteousness that's granted to us. So, Jesus accomplishes everything so that we could be received in the family. And He dies not because He deserved it, but because we do: for our rebellion, for our suppressing the truth, and unrighteousness. That's why Jesus dies. That's what our Father is like. And He calls us to lay down our rebellion, to lay down our refusal of Him, to come renouncing our own wisdom and ways and instead, relying on Christ. And when we do that, when we actively daily embrace the gospel ourselves, we put ourselves in a place where instead of sinning against other people in all this list of ways, we instead get the opportunity, (last and I promise very shortly), to bless, bless others by thinking rightly about God.

Friends, if you understand that as we embrace the gospel, that what we're embracing is the power of God for salvation. We're embracing the God who's revealed in the scriptures. When we do that, we're in the place to bless others, specifically, by speaking the gospel. That we're embracing the God that we are treasuring. We get to give away; that's what evangelism is. I hope you realize that. The God that you are treasuring, you get to give away. Get to. This is a privilege. So, I encourage you to go to PD's class. It's a privilege to give away the God that we love. It's a merciful message we preach to people about a great God.

Well, what could happen in your life if you do that? If you rightly know this God, this is, this is the apology for the series, right. If you rightly know God, what could happen in your life? Well, the ideal scenario and this probably happens every week where you live, work and play. The ideal scenario is that somebody in your life scoffs at belief in God. That happens in your life, happens in my life. I was leaving CPC this week going somewhere. And I wondered to myself: how many people, (we can look this up; part of the envisioning team probably will), how many people drive past CPC on 108? And if they see the sign or they look and go, 'Oh, a church building.' How many of them move past this facility, then say to themselves, 'A church, what an anachronism. A throwback to our less evolved selves.' What do you say to someone who scoffs at belief in the merciful creator god? The first thing you should recognize is that the hubris involved in thinking that we've evolved past belief in God is simply a 21st century example of the truth suppression that God speaks to us through Paul. It's the same thing in a different package. It's just that the package is an evolutionary, technological mindset. But it's the same thing. It's been said that the 21st century is the one that is most like the first century than any of the ones between. And if the gospel could go out in the first century and turn the world upside down, it's the power of God for salvation, friends. That's the first thing, nothing new.

Second thing. To a person who thinks or speaks like that, I want you, I want me to say, with enthusiasm to that person, you wouldn't say that if you knew God. I know Him. He's fascinating. He's wonderful and he's worth following. Knowing Him, knowing what He's done, and what He is doing in the world. It has made me a settled, happy, and hopeful person. And if you want, I'd be happy to tell you about Him. That's what I want you to be able to say to somebody who scoffs at belief in God. And if you do that, then you'd begin to bless others, because you'd be thinking rightly about God.

Let's pray together. Father, you are wonderful and amazing. Great, good, gracious, glorious, but sometimes we just forget. Sometimes if we were honest we suppress. Encourage us by the beauty of who you are, to not do that. to decenter you, but to center you. Because as we do, we simply won't sin as much because we won't feel like we need to, and we'll bless others. Change us, we pray, oh Lord. In Jesus's name, amen.