

April 2, 2017
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Peace in Chaos
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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**CHAOS OF SIN LEADS TO CULTURAL
DISINTEGRATION**
Romans 3:16-18

Generally, the great cultures and empires of history did not fall because they were overrun by a stronger nation. If that were the case, the great empire would not have been great after all. In nearly every example of history, the great cultures experienced a process of becoming less and less great until they were so weakened from within that a less powerful nation was able to overthrow them.

This scenario was obvious with the Egyptian dynasties, the Assyrian empire that fell to the Babylonians, who fell to the Persians, who fell to Alexander the Great's Greek empire, who fell to the Romans, and so on. A classic illustration is seen in Daniel chapter five where we find the posterity of the grand empire builder, Nebuchadnezzar, sunk in a drunken party with the nation's leaders while at that moment Cyrus the Persian was leading his army into the city.

The same kind of degradation was well documented in the Roman Empire. Rome did not suddenly and unexplainably fall to the mighty Goths in the third century. In fact, the Goths were not all that mighty. History records in great detail how eight different problems contributed to Rome's demise. Among those problems were greed that caused the rulers to expand the nation beyond its ability to protect and care for the people, the pursuit of pleasure not as a past time but a lifestyle, the need for people who preferred not to work to depend on slave labor, and then the problem of corruption of government officials. Notice that half of the problems that led to Rome's demise were rooted in the sin of the people and their leaders.

In light of these historical realities, we should give serious consideration to a conclusion credited to Alexis de Tocqueville, a French diplomat, political scientist, and historian. After he traveled extensively in the United States, in 1835, he published a definitive work in sociology titled, *Democracy in America*. In this work he concluded: "A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves largesse from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most benefits from the public treasury with the result that a democracy always collapses over loose fiscal policy, always followed by a dictatorship. The average age of the world's greatest civilizations has been 200 years." Which is why no congress or president will ever fully repeal the Affordable Healthcare Act. As was proven with the "Social Security Act," Franklin Roosevelt's brainstorm in 1935—once the benefit is given, no government "of the people" can take it back. In a 1943 speech titled "Industrial Management in a Republic," H. W. Prentis described the *Fatal Sequence*. He said, "The average age of the world's greatest civilizations from the beginning of history has been about 200 years. During those 200 years, these nations always progressed through the following sequence:

From bondage to spiritual faith;
From spiritual faith to great courage;
From courage to liberty;
From liberty to abundance;
From abundance to selfishness;
From selfishness to complacency;
From complacency to apathy;
From apathy to dependence;
From dependence back into bondage.

Our culture is somewhere between dependence and bondage. Typically, somewhere around this point, the people of a culture cannot agree to disagree until a dictator arises who promises to make everything right. Being completely frustrated, the people welcome the dictator with open arms. History has well documented the chaos of that cycle before, during, and after the rise of the dictator.

Why is this sequence repeated over and over in the world's great empires and nations? Actually, it is not an accident or a

coincidence. Actually, it is supernatural. Really. God, the supernatural administrator of the whole creation, has established certain rules. One of those rules is that when people reject Him and His truth, He sentences them to be destroyed on some level by the very pleasures with which they replaced God. We know too well how a sinful culture promises peace in the pursuit of pleasure. God's reality is that any pleasure that replaces Him will be the source of pain and sorrow not the source of peace. The mad pursuit of pleasure brings chaos. God, and God alone, brings peace.

Rule: God turns a people over to their passions.

God allows a choice. As in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve there is a choice to make. In the beginning the choice was to obey God and not eat the forbidden fruit or obey the desires of the flesh and eat the forbidden fruit. Adam and Eve chose the passions over the flesh and, immediately, they fulfilled God's promise and began the downward spiral to physical destruction. At the same time they experience immediate separation from God—spiritual death, as they were afraid to meet with God in the cool of the evening.

There is still a choice that we must make. Now the choice is between the gospel and personal desires. We are born with the desire to please self not God. That is natural. But pleasing self is also sin against God who is our rightful master because He is our Creator.

The gospel addresses this conflict and the choice to be made. The gospel teaches us that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sins in His sacrifice on the cross. The gospel requires us to acknowledge that we are sinners by nature. The gospel requires us to say the same thing about ourselves and our sins as God our Master says about us and our sins. The gospel requires us to trust wholly and completely on Christ's finished work to forgive our sins and grant us everlasting life. Therefore, the gospel requires death of self—a price too great for natural people to be willing to pay.

Paul chose the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation. He said, *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 (Romans 1:16)*. Through the gospel message, we learn that God graciously draws us to the Savior. Through the

gospel we learn that God opens our eyes to understand His grace. Through the gospel we learn that people who God makes righteous live righteously. *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17)*.

We know that most people will not choose the gospel. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that most people will not live by faith. Therefore, also, because they will not live by faith, their lives will not be characterized by righteousness. Because many people choose to live ungodly and unrighteous lives, there will be conflict with people who are righteous, living by faith. That is the chaos of this world.

But there is a worse consequence than simply social conflict. Rejection of the gospel causes God's wrath. *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Romans 1:18a)*. God reveals His intense anger against ungodliness. All that is contrary to Him and His character is ungodliness and unrighteousness. In a word, it is sin. The conflict from the very beginning has been righteousness versus unrighteousness. The gospel reveals the righteousness of God. Sin reveals unrighteousness. Which will rule in your life? That has been the battle from the moment sin entered the world. Cain lost the battle because sin was crouching at the door to take him down (Genesis 4:7). And most people from that point on have lost the same battle.

What does that wrong choice look like? When we understand what takes place when people choose unrighteousness over the gospel, we will understand why God pours out His wrath against those people. Paul concluded, *who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth (Romans 1:18b)*. First, unrighteousness and ungodliness is the suppression of truth. For there to be suppression of truth, there must first be knowledge of it. There is indeed. God has revealed all we need to know about Him. God's self-revelation is truth, the foundation of truth, the explanation of the source of truth. God has been very gracious to reveal this truth about Himself to us.

The truth about God is obvious in three ways or means. First, the truth about God is obvious in nature. *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 (Romans 1:19-20). Second, the truth about God is written on our consciences. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them (Romans 2:15). Third, the truth about God is taught all through the Bible. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it (Romans 3:21).

Therefore, it is fair to conclude that sinners know God and the truth about God. Knowing God, they also know their responsibility toward Him. Nevertheless, they choose not to honor God. *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 (Romans 1:21).* Instead of honoring God, unrighteous people choose to make their own religion worshiping the creature rather than the Creator. *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 reptiles (Romans 1:22-23). And they, worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!(Romans 1:25).*

This is where we are as a culture. As a nation, we have abandoned God's truth. For about 100 years academia and seminarians bought into the Higher Criticism that had been popularized in Germany in the early 19th century. By and large the religious educators of this nation began to teach that the Bible is not really the Word of God. They taught that it was a collection written over many years by mere men and, therefore, was fraught with inconsistencies and errors. They were willing to acknowledge that the Bible contained God's words in various insignificant ways, but to claim that the Bible was God's Word, inerrant and inspired, was out of the question in modern theology.

God's Word claims that it is indeed inspired, that God the Holy Spirit bore along men as they wrote God's message, that it is forever settled in heaven, that it discerns between the thoughts and intents of the heart, and that it is profitable to make us people fashioned after the image of Christ our head. God's Word also teaches (as in our text) that when mere mortals exalt themselves about God and the authority of His Word, it not only disappoints God but He responds in anger.

Our peers have chosen to reject God and the truth He has given us. God does not take rejection of Him as Creator and Lord lightly.

As a result, atheistic teachers have far more credibility than country preachers. The people of our world gladly pay \$50,000 per lecture to hear avowed atheists like the now passed Christopher Hitchens or Richard Dawkins or Sam Harris or Stephen Hawkins tell how science and human wisdom has confirmed that there is no God. It doesn't take much study to discover how such anti-God teaching has influenced the laws, practices, and acceptable positions of our land. From the elementary school through post graduate studies, nearly all teaching is thoroughly infected with the conclusion that there is no God and, therefore, we are foolish to acknowledge a non-reality. That is the sinner's choice to make. But there are consequences to face.

The consequences of unrighteous living come to bear because sometimes God acts indirectly. That is what is meant when we read four times in this text that *God gave them up* (Romans 1:24,26,28). *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves (v.24). For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions (v.26). God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done (v.28).*

The word translated *gave them up* is used in a judicial sense of someone being committed to prison (Mark 1:14; Acts 8:3). The word conveys judgment as in unbelievers delivering believers to the judges or jailers (Matt. 5:25; 10:17,19,21; 18:34). Or of God committing fallen angels to the pits of darkness (2 Peter 2:4).

The lesson here is that God gives up people to consequences in an indirect sense. It is not just that God simply leaves sinners to themselves to do what they want to do. Rather they chose to abandon God and He chooses to judicially turn them over to their sinful choices. His action is indirect in that sin always has a degenerative path. Therefore, sin always has consequences. Sinful practices that are not deterred by laws or discipline will grow worse and worse to the point of literal, physical, emotional, mental destruction. Wisdom desires for sinners to see their downward slide into the pit. However, sin's blinding effect coupled with rejection of God and His Word motivates sinners to attempt to create solutions, antidotes, or treatment for sin's consequences.

That being true, instead of enforcing rules and demanding respect at school in our culture, we hire guards and set up metal detectors at the door. Instead of forbidding fornication and adultery as God requires, we hand out free condoms. Instead of requiring young people to live with the consequences of their infidelity, we allow them to destroy the resulting babies. These are all attempts to create solutions to the problems that come when God in anger delivers a people to the consequences of their sins.

Future wrath is not the only aspect of God's wrath. Most people think that if there is a God, in that nebulous, fanciful day of judgment, God is going to punish sinners. Individuals and whole cultures have experienced (and continue to experience) God's wrath as He turns them over to their choice of sin. But this is not eternal abandonment from which repentance is impossible. For example, to the Corinthian believers it was written, *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).*

God also gives up people to consequences in a direct sense. Sometimes God sends reminders in the form of wars and natural disasters to get the rebels' attention. But seldom do the rebels respond. The universal flood was the expression of God's wrath for people abandoning Him. God desires that as sinners get deeper into the consequences of sin, they will despair and turn to Him.

God's wrath is the consequence of sin. Moral perversion or degradation in a person or a nation is not the cause of God's wrath. It is the consequence and manifestation of God's wrath. When God shows His wrath against people's sin of rejecting Him, He turns people over to greater impurity. Notice the specific statements. *To the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves (v.24). To dishonorable passions (v.26). To a debased mind to do what ought not to be done (v.28).*

Again God states the reason for His action. In wrath God delivers people to their sins, *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 (v.25). And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up (v.28). 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" (v.32).

Those warnings should shake us. Maybe more frightening though is what being left to ourselves looks like or how bad it can get. We have a good idea how to answer that question because God's wrath against sin is obvious in the American culture. The American sexual revolution is a demonstration of people judicially delivered by God to their passions. Specifically, *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 (vv.26-27).* That is God's commentary on the decision of the Supreme Judges of the land deciding that it is permissible to destroy babies that result from sinful practices, and that homosexual activity is a protected right.

But the judicial turning over has consequences broader than sexual expressions. Not only do the people God delivers to their sins go down a path of sexual perversion, but *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 (vv.29-31a).* It is difficult to live in a world like that.

In a way, all of human history displays the consequences of rejecting God and His truth. To that end Paul asks, *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips."*

“Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery” (Romans 3:9-16).

These are seven citations from the Old Testament. Five come from the Psalms (13:2,3,5; 5:10; 9:28; 35:2), one is from Isaiah 59:7-8, and one is from Ecclesiastes 7:20. These truths are from the Jews’ Bible that they claimed to believe. Ancient Jews go back a long way. Indeed, truth from antiquity shows that idolatry and degradation resulting in God’s wrath is nothing new. As our culture moves further and further away from God’s truth, these chaotic characteristics will be more and more obvious.

Being Turned Over By God Brings The Chaos That Ruins Nations.

The preceding warnings have led us to this text: *In their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes (Romans 3:16-18).* Let’s consider each phrase separately.

In their paths are ruin and misery (v.16). “Their paths” are the chosen paths of life for the unrighteous people. These are actually the acceptable paths in modern culture. These are lifestyles characterized by love of self, passions of the flesh, serving the creature rather than the Creator. These paths write the stories of all the Hollywood productions from Disney to the most gruesome violence and sexual perversion. Righteous people who live by faith should refuse to allow the popular things to influence their thinking. Unrighteous people have no choice but to follow like blind oxen to the slaughter. God has delivered the unrighteous people of our culture to these things.

Those chosen paths lead to ruin and misery. Unfortunately, the ruin and misery are not experienced until the victims are far down the path. Young people are taught that they are most important and that life revolves around them. But one day, reality sets in and things happen that disappoint them or even hurt them. At that point the spoiled children are terribly miserable. They honestly do not know how to respond to difficulty and often become mental and emotional liabilities to the whole culture.

In a similar way, we are taught through the sexual revolution that passion is natural and should be satisfied. But the result of that

path is STD’s spread at a rampant pace through a culture. The result is young people living together out of wedlock only to break up and repeat again and again until no one is able to make a commitment. The result is marriages that break up at an alarming rate, often multiple times, leaving children adrift in a wicked culture without parental supervision, or teaching, or example.

Also, our culture teaches that we have rights in order that we can be happy.”Pursuit of happiness” seems to be the only part of the Declaration of Independence with which unrighteous people are familiar. So the law of our land gives women the right to do what they want to their bodies. However, women who practice the right of abortion are not happy. People who win mega-bucks in the lottery so they never have to work are not happy. In fact, America is one the most unhappy cultures in the world. And as a nation of people we used to be the most satisfied when we feared God.

Their paths lead to misery and ruin *and the way of peace they have not known (v.17).* The way of peace begins with peace with God. Most cultures promise peace but never deliver. Our own presidents have promised “peace in our time.” But only God can give true peace. Real peace is found in a relationship with God who the unrighteous person rejects.

The people of an unrighteous nation do not know peace. Because they reject the Prince of Peace, all their efforts to establish peace are futile. Therefore, a majority of people in our nation must take tranquilizers, sleeping pills, various drugs or alcohol in order to find rest. Even true believers get so caught up in the sins that bring consequences that they forfeit the peace that Jesus offers.

There is no fear of God before their eyes (v.18). Unrighteous people do not fear God. They have rejected God. They despise His rules found in the Bible. They prefer the fulfillment of their personal desires and passions. They intentionally turn a blind eye to indisputable truth. That is way they conclude that fear is a horrible thing. They have been taught that fear of man is bad. It is. They believe that fear of consequences is unfortunate. It is. They know that fear of nature is unfavorable. It is. Therefore, unrighteous people reject the idea that fearing God is good.

But the fear of God is the only path to true peace. Fear of God begins with the acknowledgment that we should fear Him. He is our

Almighty, all powerful, majestic Creator. The Being who is able to speak all creation into existence and simply think the thought and mere people go out of existence ought to be feared. The God who can destroy the entire world in a cataclysmic flood ought to cause fear and trembling. The God who is perfectly holy will not tolerate sin in His presence and has promised to send all sinners to hell forever ought to be feared. We ought to quake in fear when we realize that we are guilty of breaking all His rules. But wait! That is not at all the source of peace.

Mature fear results in supernatural peace with God. Mature fear realizes the God can destroy me but knows that He will not because He gave His beloved Son to save me. Right and awesome respect for God is a peace with Him knowing that He is mighty and powerful enough to rescue me for eternity. Good fear of God borders on trembling with delight that the Mighty Creator has showered His immeasurable grace on me.

We come into this world with a nature that offends God. It doesn't take long for us to demonstrate that we are given over to sinning against God. God graciously reveals His nature and character to us so that we will know Him. But how do we respond when we know Him? Most people fight with God, demand their freedom from Him so they can live the way they want to. The recipient of God's grace bows before Him, acknowledges that He is perfectly justified to punish him or her for sins, but pleads for forgiveness because Jesus has paid the price for their sins. People who do that do not fear God's wrath. God's wrath is reserved for His enemies—the people who reject Him and His truth. Which unfortunately includes most of the people of our culture. When God delivers a people to their sins, that culture is in deep, deep trouble. Doesn't it make most sense for us to abandon that culture and rest in God's love?