

# The Nations Need God's Righteousness

## Part 3

### Romans 1:24-32

The nations need the righteousness of God because they live under the certain wrath of God.

LTS: Col. 3:1-10

#### Introduction:

I want to begin by reading our text for this morning. So if you have you have a bible, please stand with us as we read Ro. 1:24-32

Read Rom. 1:24-32

Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature;<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,<sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,<sup>31</sup> foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.<sup>32</sup> 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.

He who has ears to hear, let Him hear the words of the Lord. You may be seated.

When we think of the Paul's letter to the Romans, the first thing that should come to mind is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The theses statement of this inspired letter is set before us in the famous words of Paul (1:16-17).

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. <sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

The reason this is such an important statement is that, while the Gospel of God's righteousness is being revealed, the message of God's wrath is also being revealed. The reason there is a need among the nations for the Great Good News is because of there is also Terrifying Bad News; namely, that the just and holy God to whom we are responsible, must judge all unrighteousness. And the reason YOU should be concerned about this is because every person in the world apart from the Spirit stands before God as unrighteousness. That is, all of us are sinners. We are sinners by birth and by choice.

By birth, we inherited Adam's sin. If you prefer the theological term, we can say Adam's sin was imputed to us by virtue of his federal headship. In any case, we are all sinners by birth. But we are also sinners by choice. As Paul will say in Rom. 3:23, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." And every time we sin, we do it because we want to (James chapter one makes that abundantly clear).

To be sure, the theological bull's eye of these first few chapters is that no matter

- who you are,
- no matter what your parentage or pedigree,
- whether you grew up religious or irreligious,
- educated or otherwise,
- Churched or unchurched,
- you are a sinner.

John Lock and B.F. Skinner were wrong when he postulated that man is born a moral blank slate, neither good nor bad. God says otherwise; namely, that we are all born with a predisposed bent toward sin. We are fundamentally self-centered rather than God-centered and others-centered.

This reality is neatly packaged in the biblical doctrine of total depravity which teaches NOT that we are as bad as we could be, but that every part of our being is stained by sin. And because our hearts are naturally bent toward sin, we commit acts of sin in word, thought, and deed.

Because of this polluted status in the eyes of God, all men stand under the wrath or divine punishment of God that is being revealed.

Now some have objected that God is too gracious and loving to act out in wrath against anyone. Rather, they suggest that all of God's judgments are designed for correction, repentance, and transformation. God, they say, only relates to humans as a Father, never as Judge. But is that consistent with what God's word teaches? I would argue that when Paul says "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23) he is not thinking of a family relationship, but of the relationship of a judge to a criminal. For just a moment, consider the following texts of Scripture:

- A. (Eze. 18:4) The soul that sins shall die
- B. (Matt. 25:41ff) in the last day the King will say, "Depart from me you accursed ones, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels..."
- C. (Rom. 1:32) They know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die."
- D. (2 Thes. 1:7-8) "The Lord Jesus [will be] revealed from heaven with his mighty angels<sup>8</sup> in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do NOT obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."
- E. And this is a relatively small sample of such statement of divine vengeance, retribution and punishment.

But, as David Clotfelter suggests, these should be sufficient to make the point. What is promised to sinners, as sinners, is punishment. There is in none of these statements any hint that the purpose of that punishment is for the reformation of the sinner. The plain implication of them all is that sinners will be punished because it is JUST for them to be punished.<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards drives the point even further when he writes,

To say that vengeance, wrath, fury, indignation, fiery indignation, wrath without mixture, etc., mean a minor wholesome fatherly discipline, designed for the good only of the subjects, is to say that the inspired writers were grossly ignorant of the proper and common use of language."<sup>2</sup>

At the risk of belaboring the point, allow me to let David Clotfelter offer a final word. He writes,

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<sup>1</sup> David Clotfelter, *Sinners in the Hands of a Good God*, (Chicago, Moody Publishers, 2004), 32

<sup>2</sup> Clotfelter, 33

I do not see any alternative but to believe that God punishes sin because it deserves punishment. It is just for him to punish sin. And because it is just for God to punish sin, God's punishment of the wicked can be said to glorify him. It reveals his character, reinforces the sanctity of the moral law that has been broken, and counterbalances the damage done to his honor and majesty by the disobedience of his creatures. As such, the punishment of the wicked is good in and of itself, regardless of whether it results in their repentance and salvation.<sup>3</sup>

Friends, I realize that hardly anyone talks about these things anymore, and that's a significant part of the problem. How are people to know that they need God's Redeeming Grace if they are not acquainted with God's Righteous Wrath? Paul wants you to know about God's wrath so that you would flee to the remedy found only in Jesus Christ!

So, we have talked about the

- Doctrine of Depravity
- A Defense of God's Wrath
- The objects of God's wrath (i.e. sinners)
- A couple weeks ago we learned some of the features of God's wrath.
- Over the past two weeks we have learned the reasons for God's wrath.
- But before we dive into our text for the morning, I want to introduce you to Five kinds of Wrath mentioned in the Bible.

1. Eternal Wrath: Eternal wrath consists of Hell: Lake of fire, perdition, where the worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.
2. Eschatological wrath: This is the kind of wrath that Will fall on the earth at the coming of Jesus Christ (Matt. 25:41) Rev. 6-19
3. Cataclysmic Wrath: Noah and the great flood, Sodom and Gomorrah; in N.T. the promised destruction of Corizin and Bethsaida. Think of Pompeii.
4. Consequential Wrath  
That is, the kind of wrath that God brings as a natural consequence of their sinful actions.
5. Wrath of Abandonment. (Judicial Abandonment). Samson was abandoned by God (he did not know that the Lord had left him. This is the kind of wrath Paul is speaking of here: The Wrath of Judicial Abandonment. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Clotfelter, 36

<sup>4</sup> Adaped from John MacArthur, audio Sermon, *The Reality of God's Wrath*. Rom 1:18-32; Mar 14, 1998. Last viewed on April 30, 2021.

<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-184/the-reality-of-gods-wrath>

The point of the text before us is that when people abandon God, God abandons them (see vv. 24, 26, 28)

This brings us to the substance of God's wrath. What exactly does God do to people and nations who abandon the Lord? He abandons them. That is, he withdraws his hand of blessing and protection and moral restraint. We see this three times in the text where Paul repeatedly says,

- (24) "God gave them over."
- (26) "God gave them over."
- (28) "God gave them over."

The phrase "gave them over" is actually only one word in the Greek. (*Paradidome*). It means,

- "to hand over
- to or to deliver;
- to give someone up;
- to hand someone over as to the police or to the courts.
- To betray, as Judas did to Jesus.

An example of how this word is used in the N.T. is when (Matt. 5:25) Jesus says,

Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, unless your accuser hand you over to the judge and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.

The difference in our text, however, is that God is not abandoning sinners to other people, but to their own lusts, impulses, and deviant desires. To what does God abandon people when they abandon him? First, He abandons them to their Lusts.

## I. Abandoned to their Lusts

Read v. 24-25

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

1. The "therefore" at the beginning of this verse points back to the three reasons the wrath of God is being revealed against all ungodliness and wickedness of men." Namely, because

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- they have suppressed the truth of God,
- they have denied the revelation of God, and
- they have exchanged the worship of God.

2. How does God respond when people or a nation abandon Him? He gives them over to their “*epithumea*,” (strong desires. Often translated lusts). In this case it is strong sexual desires.

- A. If we had time, we could look at statistics about the phenomenal increase in the use of birth control among teenagers; the number of un-wed mothers; The number of abortions, etc. Beloved, this is not merely a phenomenon in our country. It is the judgment of God on us! He has removed his hand of restraining grace. He has let us have what we insisted on having!

3. It may be helpful to recall at this point that Paul is writing this epistle from Corinth, a city notorious for its sexual immorality and debauchery. As William Hendriksen reminds us, “The expression to ‘live like a Corinthian’ meant to live a life of moral degradation.”<sup>5</sup>

That is, God puts them in the custody of their own desires.

4. As a modern preacher who has lived in America for 57 years, it is easy to build a bridge between the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Roman empire and 21<sup>st</sup> Century America. Anyone with a rudimentary knowledge the social upheaval that began in the 1960’s will immediately connect the dots.

- A. At first the sexual revolution seemed like the foolish musings of a bunch of free-spirited college kids. But it was actually blatant rebellion against God.
- B. though they were repeatedly called to repentance by the faithful preachers of their time, they persisted anyway. So, God began unleashing His judgment. He gave them over to their desires.

5. What was the source of their unbridled lust? Why were they so eager to cast aside God’s faithful counsel on sexual ethics and moral responsibility? Verse 25 suggests that it began when they adopted a warped view of God. Paul says they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed forever.

6. You see beloved, as I said last week, the person of God is the ultimate reality of the Cosmos. When a man or woman begins denying that reality, they begin drifting off course until they find themselves irredeemably shipwrecked.

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<sup>5</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul ‘s Epistle to the Romans. New Testament Commentary*, Michigan, Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1980), 75

7. They didn't realize it in the 1960, but the God they were abandoning we actually abandoning them to heterosexual lust of their hearts.

8. Now at first that may sound not so bad. But my friend, listen carefully: "the worst thing that could ever happen to a sinner is to be allowed to go on sinning without any divine restraint."<sup>6</sup> Why? Because there is a God, and we are accountable to Him. He is too holy NOT to judge.

9. Puritan Pastor, Jeremiah Burroughs, in his book *Gospel Worship*, offers a stunning contribution here. Preaching on God's judgment upon Aaron's sons (Lev. 10) , he declares...

I beseech you, brethren, to consider this. God stands upon nothing more than to appear to all the world to be a holy God. There's the glory of God's name in an eminent way. God does not so much stand upon this, to appear to be a strong God, to appear to be a powerful God, to be a God of patience, long-suffering. God does not so much stand to be an omniscient God, though these attributes are dear to [Him], but that He may appear to be a holy God... He is resolved that He shall have the glory of His holiness above all things.<sup>7</sup>

So, in Rom. 1, God abandoned them to their sexual lusts.

Second, God...

## II. Abandoned to their Passions

Read v. 26-27

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

1. God abandoned them to heterosexual lust, but that did not satisfy their depraved thirst for more. So, God abandoned them to homosexual lust.

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<sup>6</sup> R.C. Sproul, audio message *God's Wrath on Unrighteousness*.

<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Worship*, Morgan, PA., Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990), 37-38

2. In our own country, when we got to the 1980's the sexual revolution mutated into a homosexual revolution. In v. 26, some versions say, "For even their women..." That seems to be the appropriate emphasis here. We might expect the men to be brutish, unrefined, and reckless, but for the women to plunge themselves into such unnatural relations with other women was difficult to imagine. Nevertheless, in Paul's order, the women were the first to push for homosexual revolution.

3. Then the men did the same. They were consumed with passion for other men, and suffered the due penalty of their error.

- A. Am I suggesting that the virtual pandemic of STD's and Aids that began in the 80's and 90's may have been God's judgment on those who practice such things?
- B. No. I'm declaring it outright. God abandoned them to their desires, and they have suffered the "due penalty for their error."

4. Nevertheless, not even that would bring them to repentance. So God gave them over to a Debased (depraved) mind.

## II. Abandoned to their Depraved Minds

Read v. 28

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.

1. Since they still did not see fit to acknowledge God and having discarded the God-ordained pleasures of marital love for a perverted contrivance of sexual sin, God abandoned them to a debased (or depraved) mind. Now "Pandora's Box has been flung wide open. All restraints are off! There is no longer a brake pedal on man's increasingly deviant and destructive desires.

2. Now at this point, some of you may be feeling a surge of indignation against people who practice such sin. But Paul isn't finished. From here he offers a list of sins that are so universally practiced by mankind that (as R.C. Sproul said) "if you can make it through the whole list without feeling any pangs of conscience, You're a psychopath!"<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> R.C. Sproul, Audio Sermon, *God's Wrath on the Unrighteous*, (Romans 1:22-32), 2007



3. We only have time to read through the list rather quickly, but in your heart of hearts, acknowledge in your heart every time the word of God exposes a particular sin in your own heart.

Read 29-32

They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,<sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,<sup>31</sup> foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.<sup>32</sup> 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.

4. This, beloved, is how God views humanity. All of us without exception are born with a self-centered, depraved heart that demands to have every desire fulfilled, no matter how immoral or hurtful to ourselves and others. It is a terrible picture. But it is necessary that we see the predicament that we are in before the eyes of God!

5. But aren't you glad this is NOT the end of the book of Romans! If it were, we would all be doomed! But praise God there is more! Though we may be "filled with all manner of unrighteousness, God sent His one and only Son to fulfill all righteousness and pay for our unrighteousness by bearing in his body the full measure of the holy wrath of God in our place.

6. There is a gospel dynamic I want to mention before we finish. As we think of the wrath of abandonment, we need to be encouraged by the fact that often, by the sovereign kindness of God, that sometimes His abandonment is NOT final. Sometimes he abandons the sinner for a season to expose their need, and then he swoops in with the power of redeeming grace to rescue us as a brand from the fire.

7. I know for a fact that this is the testimony of many who are here today. You know this kindness of the Lord and you will be forever grateful for such mercy. Indeed, I myself am among that number, and for that privilege I intend to praise His name forever.

8. I don't know how to serve you better at this point than to simply to quote Stephen Charnock from his massive books entitled, *The Existence and Attributes of God*. He writes,

Not all the vials of judgment that have or shall be poured out upon the wicked world, nor the flaming furnace of a sinner's conscience, nor the

irreversible sentence pronounced against the rebellious demons, nor the groans of the damned creatures, give such a demonstration of God's hatred of sin, as the wrath of God let loose upon His Son. Never did Divine holiness appear more beautiful and lovely than at the time our Savior's countenance was most marred in the midst of His dying groans. This He Himself acknowledges in Psalm 22. When God had turned His smiling face from Him, and thrust His sharp knife into his heart, which forced that terrible cry from Him, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

Friends, all this talk of God's wrath will feel laborious, heavy and even crushing to our souls if it doesn't drive us to the cross where Jesus bore all of God judgment in His body on the cross for all who will believe.

Do you believe?