

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

August 21, 2016

Let Not Your Hearts be Troubled

John 14:27

Prayer: *Father, we just again, I want to pray for the Barber Family. I just want to pray for the shock I'm sure that was and we just understand that for Bob it's an incredible blessing to go to sleep on earth and wake up in heaven, and that's wonderful for him, but the family is left with the rest. So we pray for grace, we pray for peace and power for them. I just continue to pray this morning for ourselves, for us as a body, he's part of our body, when one part of the body hurts, the body hurts, and so we just pray for them. I pray, too, for the message this morning. I pray, too, for the word that we have to present, and again, let not your hearts be troubled, these are troubling times, so I pray that your Holy Spirit would be guiding my words, that you would give them your strength and your power, not my own, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

John 14:27 says: "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." You probably know this is a text that we have been looking at extensively in our communion series, and if there's

ever a text that describes people's attitudes towards our country's politics and culture, I would say this is the one, because folks are troubled and folks are afraid. We appear to be in some type of cultural free fall and many, many people have no idea where any of this is going to end, and so I want to spend some time this morning assuring you that God is still sovereign and that he is still in control and that the very events that seem to indicate that God is losing control are in fact attested to by scripture to be the unfolding of God's will.

I want to start out by giving you one example. I mean, I don't know anyone who can see what is unfolding with ISIS and with Christians in the Middle East and not wonder, God, if you are in control, how is it that your people are being so brutalized? You know, if there's one thing that you've heard me say over and over again, it's that this planet, not just one group of people, but this planet is involved in a proxy war and it's a proxy war that's been going on since the dawn of creation, and it is a war between the forces of light and the forces of darkness, and the ones who are caught up in the actual warfare, the ones who are caught in the middle is us. It's us human beings. We are the crown of God's creation, we are the only creatures that were made in God's image, and as such, it is we who are caught up in the middle of this warfare.

Jesus Christ is the one true God and Christianity is the one true religion, and it makes a very fundamental claim about the nature of this world. It says that ever since the originators of the human race Adam and Eve fell, that this world is now fallen as well. It says this is a broken, sinful world, a world that is in rebellion toward its creator. Adam and Eve defied and disobeyed God and every one of their subsequent offspring has that defiance built into them right from birth. You know, some people call it original sin, some people call it the fall of Adam, some people call it the fall of man. It is the legacy of every single human being born on the face of this earth. Now as Christians we understand that every single person who is on this earth is born literally shaking his fist at God. We understand that because the Bible states it categorically. It says this in *Ephesians 2:3*, it says: *We all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.* See, if all of us were by nature children of God's wrath, that means that all of us on some unconscious level want nothing to do with the God who created us. Even though God at great cost made our reconciliation with him possible, I mean, the second part of the verse that I just read says this, this is *Ephesians 2:4*, it says: *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ*

-- *by grace you have been saved.* So we understand that Jesus Christ took on flesh and then he lived out this perfect life and he offered up that life as a substitute for our lives of sin, and by placing our faith in his perfect sacrifice, we can stand before God clothed in his righteousness instead of our sin. And we understand that's why God can say in verse 5: *Even when we were dead in our trespasses, he made us alive together with Christ -- by grace you have been saved.*

Now Christianity calls every single person on the planet to account for the brokenness of the relationship they have with God. And God basically gives us two choices: You can either repent or you can be forever alienated from him. The simple fact is the vast majority choose to be alienated. They want their own pathway, they want their own life-style, they really want their own god. And that's why Jesus described the road to destruction as being like this incredibly beautifully paved four-lane highway and the pathway to eternal life as this rickety, barely trodden foothold. He says this in *Matthew 7:13*, he says: *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."* Now, I just want you to think for a second and understand, it stands to reason that the vast majority of the people in this country who are

on that four-lane highway, well, they have a natural antipathy, not towards Buddhism or Hinduism or even Islam in spite of its atrocity but towards Christianity, because it's the faith that has a claim on their lives. And it all goes back to this proxy war, and now this proxy war is coming down to two main players.

You know, Islam has been on everybody's hearts and minds for the past few years because of the viciousness of their attacks not just on Christianity but on all of Western civilization. And if you begin to peel back the layers as you look at this faith, you will see that radical Islam is a perfect demonic mirror of Christianity. I mean, if Satan were to design a false religion, he couldn't do any better than designing Islam, which states that there's but one God, and then it goes on to deny and denounce even the idea that that God would take on flesh in the form of Jesus, the Christ. The idea that God would stoop that low is so incredibly repulsive to radical Islam that they feel duty bound to destroy it. I find it interesting that on the political side of things we have our president telling us that the reason why he is so determined to tear down Guantanamo is that in his view it is the leading cause of recruitment to ISIS. And time and again our president has told us that ISIS uses Guantanamo to get people to sign on to Jihad because they're so outraged at the presence of this prison camp. That's not true. That simply is not so. And I can say that with

certainty because ISIS themselves have said so. You know, ISIS produces a slick glossy English language edition of their propaganda in a magazine. The magazine is known as *Dabiq*. They've named their magazine after the city that they believe Armageddon is going to take place, in great clash between the two great cultures, the two great religions. Recently the magazine came out with a definitive article on what it is that drives them, and the article was entitled "Why We Hate You and Why We Fight You." And guess what, it's got nothing to do with Guantanamo. It's got everything to do with this battle between the forces of light and darkness. The magazine's title specifically answered why they hate us and why they fight us. The title of the magazine was -- get this -- "Break the Cross." Its cover, I think I have it -- it's cover shows an Islamic soldier doing that, he's on top of the church and he's breaking down a cross. Sarah Dean writing for the *Daily Mail* said this, said: "ISIS has urged its supporters to break" -- not bear the cross -- "break the cross, and call Jesus a 'slave to Allah' in the latest issue of its propaganda magazine, *Dabiq*. The 15th issue of the twisted multi-lingual publication appears to try and convert Christians and attempts to claim that ISIS is in fact Islamic."

"Speaking of Christians, the magazine states: 'In essence, we explain why they must abandon their infidelity -- that's us -- 'and

accept Islam, the religion of sincerity and submission to the Lord of the heavens and the earth,' the magazine says. The editorial claims Jesus himself is a 'slave of Allah' and that 'the true religion of Jesus Christ is a pure monotheistic submission.' It adds that when Jesus returns in the final days he will 'wage jihad for the cause of Allah.'"

Now anyone who follows the news knows that ISIS is guilty of the most horrendous attacks on Christians. And they know that their signature for those attacks is the phrase "Allahu Akbar" which means "all glory to God." Now, I want you to back up a little bit. I want you to understand something about this symbol that we have, you see it in our lobby, we've mentioned it many, many times, this is a symbol that you see posted around the church, and it's the Arabic letter "N," and that letter stands for the term "Nazarene." And the reason why it's there is because when ISIS comes into a town, the first thing they do is they interview the elders, the church elders, and they find out where the Christians are, who they are, and where they live and then they spray paint that letter on their doors to let the other members of ISIS know that these are the people to be singled out for arrest, torture and execution.

Now you just might think when you read these things over and over again that things are just spinning out of control and there's

nothing but chaos for Christians. But what if these actions, as horrendous as they are, were something that God clearly predicted would be happening? You see, as ISIS marches through the Middle East shutting down churches and synagogues, butchering those who name the name of Christ, I can't help but think of Jesus's words in John's gospel. We just recently spoke about them, Jesus is leaving for his own crucifixion and he's warning his disciples about the terrible persecution that is going to follow, and his words are incredibly full of meaning for his disciples but they're now full of meaning for us. Listen to what Jesus said in *John 16:1*, he said: *"I have said all of these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me."* I look at that I said what Jesus said 2,000 years ago is precisely what is taking place today. ISIS is killing Christians thinking they are offering service to God. Allahu Akbar. And the reason why they think that is exactly what Jesus said, *"They have not known the Father, nor me."*

You see, I think it's easy to look around at culture and politics and think that God has somehow failed and somehow or other the forces of darkness have closed in and we see these awful things taking place in the Middle East and we also see awful things taking

place right here in our own country which appears to be in the middle of a cultural collapse. We understand that Jesus's words to both parties is *"Let not your hearts be troubled."* And he said that because God is still sovereign and he still sits on his throne. And so I want to spend some time this morning assuring you that this is still the case by pointing out to you what we see taking place in our country today as something that is not random, something that is not by chance but is all exactly what God would said he would do in response to our turning our backs on him. Now I tell people all the time, what you see today, you open up your newspaper and you get up in the morning, you read all of this stuff, you turn on the TV, what you see taking place today is the unfolding of Romans 1 before our eyes. Let me just read to you this passage so you can see what I mean.

This is Romans 1 starting at verse 18. It says: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they*

became futile if 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 decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

I submit to you that this is exactly what we are seeing today when

you open up your newspaper, this is exactly what we are seeing. And so the first question that I want to ask is, okay, what is this great sin that provokes this great wrath from God? What is this great sin that virtually all other sin springs from? Well, God doesn't leave us to guess. He says right from the start: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* Maybe we need to back up first and say, okay, we're talking about the wrath of God revealed. What is the wrath of God? Let me give you a definition by J. I. Packer. He says: "God's wrath in the Bible is never the capricious, self-indulgent, irritable, morally ignoble thing that human anger so often is. It is, instead, a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil." I think we all get that. I think if you saw a god or heard of a god that didn't care about what Hitler did, or a god that didn't care that ISIS is slaughtering people left and right, you would say there's something seriously deficient with that god's understanding. So we understand that God's wrath is absolutely necessary, but we understand it for the big, big sins, the major sins. What we don't understand is that God is transcendentally flawless and God's wrath must be extended not just to the big sins, but to all sin -- any sin, any sin that's ever committed ever by anyone anywhere is -- has to result in some type of response that is the wrath of God. I tell people all the time, you really only

have two choices in this, the wrath of God is going to fall either on you or it's going to fall on Jesus Christ who was willing to bear it for you. But here we're talking about God's wrath displayed publicly, God's corporate wrath. And God's corporate wrath has been displayed in numerous occasions in the scripture. We've seen it in the great flood with Noah, we saw it in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, we saw it with the plagues that took place in Egypt and we will see it in the bowls of wrath in Revelation, and they're all poured out on the earth in a sense. This expression of God's wrath is altogether different. It's not like any of the others, it's not an external expression like fires and floods and plagues.

As I said, it's an altogether expression of wrath but first we need to understand the why. I mean why is God's wrath revealed? Well, he says there's an objective moral evil that has produced it, and the objective moral evil that has produced God's wrath is that we have taken God's truth and suppressed it in unrighteousness. You see, our culture is evolved to the place where you can curse God, you can laugh at him, you can mock him but you cannot acknowledge him for who he is. We have suppressed the truth of God in unrighteousness and God's wrath is the result. He says: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the*

truth. 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. See what God is saying is the evidence of my presence is overwhelming and the only way that this truth can be contained the way you contain it is by suppressing it, by pushing it down. You know, the psalmist says: *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.* What God is saying is the truth about God, it's not missed, it's not somehow misunderstood. It is maliciously denied. You say how? And God says in unrighteousness.

My friend Mike likes to talk about the truth of God is like beach balls. They're held -- when you say this truth of God is suppressed in unrighteousness, he says if you ever take a beach ball and you try to hold it underwater, you can do it but it takes a lot of energy. You can't be distracted by it because the moment you're distracted, it's going to pop right back up again. So what we do is we suppress all this truth about who God is and we're constantly amazed and disturbed, at least the secular press is

amazed and disturbed, because God's is proof is constantly popping up right in their face. *John 3:36* says: *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."* People say well, why should I suffer wrath just because I don't get your Jesus? Understand, this is not -- God's not talking about simple ignorance. He is talking about willful defiant ignorance. And God says why he sees it in scripture. He says: *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.* What God is saying is go outside and just breathe his air and go stand on this earth that is clothed in his grass and look up at his trees and see the birds chasing his insects under his clouds under his sky, and then wait until the night time until you see his stars and his planets come out. And try to imagine a scenario that cuts him virtually out of the picture. Well, it took thousands and thousands of years, but we've managed to find one. We call it naturalistic evolution, and it does precisely that. It looks at the abundant physical evidence of God's divine attributes and insists that's not evidence at all. It insists that God had nothing whatsoever to do with creation and that it's not God but random chance and endless time that is responsible for all of it.

Well, God goes on to say: *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 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.* See, we here in the West, we've exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an image resembling mortal man, and actually it's not a mortal man, it's a mortal woman. We have a god and our god is a woman that we call "mother nature." I mean that's our god, I mean, if you think about it. And I have to break the news. There's no such thing as mother nature. She doesn't exist. That's a shock to a lot of people. I mean given the fact that so many want to embrace an atheistic naturalistic evolution that says that every single thing that happens in this world is a mindless accumulation of random chance happenings that produced everything we know of, it is astounding, astounding to me how tightly we cling to this idea of mother nature.

You know, I did this before in our Wednesday night class but I want to repeat some of the headlines that shout out our attachment to her. These are just some random headlines. Headline one: Clean Energy? Mother Nature Still Knows Best. That was the European Commission on Energy. Another one is: Mother Nature Fights Back Against Climate Change. That was from *Nature World News*. *Science*

Daily offered this one up: "Scientists Enhance Mother Nature's Carbon Handling Mechanism. Taking a page from Nature herself, a team of researchers developed a method to enhance removal of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and place it in the Earth's oceans for storage." God did that. Mother Nature had nothing to do with that. Lawrence Livermore Laboratory had this headline: Speeding up Mother Nature's Very Own CO2 Mitigation Process. And you can guess that there's hundreds and hundreds of these headlines. I mean, I just Googled "Mother Nature headlines." Tons of them. But there's a reason why mother nature is front and center in terms of our worship. There's a reason why mother nature is that way in spite of the fact that science itself insists that no one and nothing is responsible for everything. It is because God created all of us as creatures designed to bring honor and glory to him. And so all of us are born with this innate need to worship something. When that something becomes no one, nothing and nobody, then we're forced to invent something to fill that void, and that something is now mother nature. Mother nature is an image resembling mortal man or woman. And as C. K. Chesterton once said: "When a man stops believing in God he doesn't then believe in nothing, he believes anything."

And so God's indictment of us continues at verse 23, it says:

Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of

the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. See, God says when you suppress the truth in unrighteousness about who God really is, you just shift your focus of worship. You don't stop worshiping because you can't because God designed you that way. We are creatures designed by God for the express purpose of worship. So instead of stopping our worship, we simply exchange the glory of the immortal God for the image of a man or woman or a bird or an animal or creeping thing like an insect. I mean, we may think we have gotten way too sophisticated for that kind of crude worship but if you look at the things that people in our culture pour their hearts and their souls and their time and their money into, you'd be amazed at how many of those are represented by creatures instead of by the Creator. Ray Stedman pointed out that whether you worship the image of man that Hollywood routinely offers up or the birds, animals, and insects that are now the name of our sports teams and sports cars, well, we still have a connection to that type of worship. See, you may mock God, you may mock the worship of God while you spend your Sundays worshiping birds with names like Ravens or Cardinals or Sea Hawks or Eagles and you may get to your game by driving something else that you pour your life into with names of animals like an Impala or a Stingray or a Ram or a Mustang. Even crawling things are represented by cars named Vipers and sports teams named Hornets. Now I can allow this could be just a coincidence, maybe it's just a

coincidence that our culture is so fascinated with these names or maybe it's the outworkings of refusing to worship the Creator instead of the creature.

See, Romans 1 reads like an indictment and it reads like an indictment because essentially it is. God is holding us accountable for three different things that he refers to as willful exchanges. And in turn, we experience three different levels of God giving us up. The first exchange takes place in verse 21. It says: *Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man -- and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.* This is the first exchange. We exchange the true God for a false corrupted image. They changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man. That's what God says this is what you exchange, and here's your consequences, verse 24: *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.*

See, you have to understand the consequences of these actions. They're not like any other we've ever seen from God, I mean, people understand the wrath of God, they understand that's supposed to be earthquakes, that's supposed to be famine, that's pestilence. Well, that's not at all the case in Romans 1. What we see unfolding in Romans 1 is actually something that is far worse. It is God giving us up. In essence God is saying because of your rebellion, I am taking my hands off you and I am leaving you more and more to your own understandings of what is right and wrong. Three times we're going to hear God say, "therefore God gave them up." Understand, that's an expression of God's wrath. And each time God says it, we experience what it is like to have God take his protective hands off us.

Now, our first exchange of the true God for a false corrupted image leads to the first of God's giving us up: *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.* Well now, let me ask, have you seen this happening at all? Can we see this unfolding? Is there any proof or evidence that this is taking place? Well, how about the rise of hyper sexualization in our culture, literally the dishonoring of our bodies among ourselves. I mean, does this sound at all familiar? Is there any question at all that we are the most hyper sexualized culture in history? I mean, you can't turn on the

TV without getting smacked in the face by it. And pornography is everywhere, it's on our TVs, it's on our computers, it's even on our smart phones, just a click, that's all you need. Porn stars are now celebrities who accompany their film openings with autograph signings and the like. You know, what everybody's touting now is virtual reality, it's right around the corner. Virtual reality, you can literally have a sexual experience with something that exists only virtually. You get it with a click of a button. I submit to you that we are experiencing exactly what God said would happen when we exchange the true God for a false image. God gives us up, and he gives us up to our own false worship. Like I said, we worship things because we have to, because that's the way we were designed, but now our worship is turned inward and we're worshiping our own bodies, dishonoring them in the process. And we spend years now reveling into the dishonoring of our own bodies amongst ourselves and now that behavior has its own consequence, and we see that in verse 26. It says: *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.*

I've said many, many times that Christians really do not get the phenomenon that we see surrounding us, the homosexual phenomenon. Many Christians say, well, homosexuality is rampant and the wrath of God is coming because of it. I say that's perfectly backwards. You're not seeing what God is saying here. What Romans 1 is saying is because we have suppressed the truth in unrighteousness, the wrath of God is already here. And because of that wrath, God has given us up to dishonorable passions, therefore homosexuality is now rampant. We have entered into a moral free fall and it always progresses from bad to worse. See, there are three terrible exchanges that sinful man engages in that results in three forms of abandonment by God. The first exchange is the true God for a false image of a corruptible God. The second exchange is the truth about God for lies, and the third exchange is that of natural relations for unnatural, and each exchange that we undertake produces a corresponding abandonment by God for that exchange. And each abandonment takes us deeper and deeper into our own depravity. The result is three separate times in this scripture we come across the phrase "God gave them up," "God gave them up," "God gave them up." And the results of these abandonments are not earthquakes, they're not pestilence, they're not famine, it is God progressively removing his common grace from normal human understanding. God is removing from human beings the ability to see in the simplest terms what is incredibly obvious.

You know, when Target announces that you can now use any bathroom you want depending on what gender you now perceive yourself as, you have been given up by God. When school systems institute policies forbidding elementary school teachers from using the terms "girls" and "boys," -- which they have -- when you have this purple unicorn -- which I think is up there right now -- that is now a teaching tool that is designed to teach little ones about the fluidity of their gender, if you look at this thing, you say your gender identity consists of anything that you choose, your expression is male, female, masculine, other, sex assigned at birth as other or intersex in addition to female and male. This is demonic, let me tell you. You know, what is astounding to me is this unicorn teaches little ones that the gender that they were born with is only a minor biological construct. You know, a reasonable person is going to look at this and conclude we've lost our minds. What in the world has happened? We Christians are constantly accused of being anti science. The folks who produced that are not only anti science, they're anti common sense. I say this in all seriousness, this is the wrath of God displayed in that type of insanity.

I once coined the term "judicial blindness" and I say it is the penalty imposed by God of having even the simplest ability to

discern between what is obviously right and obviously wrong taken away. And the principle's in *Luke 8:18*, it says: *"Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."* I submit to you that that's already happened. I submit to you that the scripture contains the result, it's *Isaiah 5:20*. It says: *Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight! God's ultimate punishment is leaving us to our own insanity.*

I mean, you know why our country is embroiled in a battle over whether or not people can use the -- the bathroom not assigned to their gender? It's because we're collectively losing our minds. So the question is why is so much of this then, why is it all centered around sexuality? Why is it so much having to do with sexual sins and in particular homosexuality? Well, each exchange represents God's natural order being exchanged for something that is unnatural, something that's against nature. I mean think of the scriptures, it says: *(We) changed the glory of the incorruptible God to the image made like corruptible man.* Well, that's exchanging a real God for a fake image. Then it says *(we) exchange the truth about God for a lie.* That's exchanging truth for lies.

Now it says: *For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise.* That's exchanging natural passions for unnatural. See, there's a reason why God chose homosexuality as a sin to highlight because it fundamentally represents turning the natural order upside down, turning the natural order to the unnatural. And this is what God says in verse 26: *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.* Now understand why Paul chose this as an example. Kevin DeYoung wrote a wonderful little book called *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality*, and in it he describes the reason why Paul explained it this way, it says this: "In Paul's mind, same-sex sexual intimacy is an especially clear illustration of the idolatrous human impulse to turn away from God's order and design. Those who suppress the truth about God as revealed in nature suppress the truth about themselves written in nature. Homosexual practice is an example on a horizontal plane of our vertical rebellion against God. Homosexual behavior is a sin, not according to who practices it or by what motivation they seek it, but because that act itself, as a truth-suppressing exchange, is contrary to God's good design."

So just to sum, we have these three different exchanges, we have the exchange of truth for lies, a true God for a false image, and a natural passion for an unnatural, and they provoke three great abandonments by God. Verse 24: *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity.* Verse 26: *For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions;* and verse 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.* This is God's final abandonment. This is what brings this awful series to a close. And the final abandonment is an abandonment to a debased mind. This is what he says in verse 28: *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 decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.*

See, Paul is completing this passage with a discussion of the ultimate sign of God's abandonment. And what he's doing here, he

describes 21 different sins, and I guarantee you, every one of us in this room can identify with some of those sins. Been there, done that. But he ends verse 32 with someone who not only practices the sins, but he has no guilt, he has no remorse whatsoever; in fact, having committed these sins, he's now standing on the sidelines cheering along his fellow rebellious ones in their sin. He's describing someone who is beyond rebuke, someone who absolutely refuses to hear God at all, and he's describing the end product of our rebellion, the end product of our suppressing the truth. It's the end product of God giving us up. See, hearts that have grown so cold that no sin is too great or too small is what we are seeing. And what we are seeing is that all sin now meets with the hearty approval of those who are engaged in it. This is what we as a culture have become.

The *New York Times* recently got wind of this passage and then proceeded to come up with a news story that perfectly illustrates exactly what this hard-heartedness entails. Alex Griswold writing about this wrote in *Mediaite*, wrote this, this is the headline, says: "New York Times Misunderstands Bible Verse, Thinks Republican Called for Gays to be Executed." It goes on to say: If you read the New York Times Thursday, you'd be shocked to discover that recently a Republican congressman read to his colleagues a New Testament verse written by the Apostle Paul calling for the

execution of gays. No doubt you'd be doubly shocked if you are a Christian or even have a passing familiarity with the New Testament, since such a verse does not actually exist. According to the Times" -- this is the New York Times -- "a Republican congressman read his colleagues a Bible verse from Romans that calls for the execution of gays." Their source for that accusation is a May complaint by the gay rights organization Human Rights Watch: 'HRC Calls on Republican Leadership to Condemn Lawmaker's Attacks on LGBT People as "Worthy of Death."' Neither the Times or HRC names the verse in question, but according to *Roll Call*, Georgia Congressman Rick Allen read from Romans 1:18-32." The article goes on to quote the very passage we're looking at this morning, and it notes in particular in bold, it says this: The verse 32 that we're looking at right now: *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.* Now, the article goes on to say: "It's that bolded section that appears to be the source of the misunderstanding. Yes, it says that those who practice the listed sins 'deserve death' but that's because Christians believe that everyone deserves death. That's kind of the whole point of our religion: Through the mercy and sacrifice of Jesus, we can avoid the punishment we justly deserve. If HRC or the New York Times had actually sat down for a second and listened to what Allen said, it would have been painfully obvious that it

was not a call for execution. The condemnations of homosexuality come alongside condemnations of those who envy, lie, boast, cheat, gossip, disobey their parents, fail to love others, etc. You would have to believe that for the past two thousands years, Christian teaching has called for the execution of every person who has ever lived. The Federalist's Mollie Hemingway (who first pointed out the error, and masterfully so) explains just how common the phrase is in Christianity, and how two minutes of research could have avoided this mistake: The 'worthy of death' phrase (in my Bible, it's 'deserve to die') is simply a restating of a basic teaching of Christianity. Let's hop on over to Romans 6:23 'For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.' This is the good news of Christianity! We're all sinners who deserve death, but in Christ Jesus, we receive forgiveness and eternal life."

Now, you might be saying to yourself at this point, okay, ISIS is butchering us, God has abandoned us and even the New York Times is totally misquoting us, so why is this message entitled "Let Not Your Hearts Be Troubled?" Well, allow me to point out the only two choices we really have here, okay? We can believe as the -- those who in the secular world like to believe, that these things randomly happen and that everyone involved from a lowly laborer up to the president himself just has to learn that these random

occurrences happen and they apparently are happening in a way that has turned ugly towards us. We can believe that or you can believe that a sovereign God who rules both heaven and earth and whose ways are far, far above our ways is still in charge and still in control of this world, a world that just happens, for all intents and purposes, to look like it's spinning out of control. Now, the first question I would ask is in what direction does the evidence point? Well, I can tell you this, I see in the very pages of scripture Jesus warning us in the gospel of John precisely what we see ISIS doing. I see Paul in the book of Romans describing to an uncanny tee exactly what we see unfolding before us politically and culturally. And I see in the New York Times an organization that prides itself on its sophistication, I see it reduced to a laughingstock by the simple wisdom of believers who are willing to push back. I see God's fingerprints all over this.

I let not my heart be troubled because I also see a solution to the abandonment that we are experiencing right now. I believe it's God's answer for us, and I've been disappointed to hear people dispute this, this has now become something that people argue over and it's disputed because people claim, well, these words were originally addressed only to God's people the Jews and only in the Old Testament and the United States is not these people, so it doesn't apply to us. True enough, it applied specifically to the

Jews in the Old Testament. But the principle of what I'm going to read to you applies, and the principle is that the health of the nation is directly attributable to the health of God's people within that nation. So I can see precisely what God said to his people to our people in 2 Chronicles 7:14, he says: *If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.* You see, the key to fixing what's wrong with America is not found in Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton. It's found right here in you and me. It's found among God's people, and God still has his hands on his people. And it is God's people alone who have the power to turn the country around. So let not your hearts be troubled. Let's pray.

Father God, again we can look around and just see all of the events and just throw up our hands and say, "It's over, we've lost," or we can see between the lines and we can compare scripture with scripture and we can see patterns evolving. We can see patterns taking place that illustrate that you have not at all abandoned us and exactly what you have said would happened is exactly what we see happening. Lord, enable that to give us the courage to go on, the courage to trust in your sovereign hand, in your Holy Spirit's power enough to trust that we are the ones who are called by your

name who need to pray and seek your face and turn from our wicked ways. We trust that you will then hear from heaven and forgive our land. I pray that you would give each and every one of us the ability not just to believe ourselves but to share it with those who so desperately need to hear it. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

August 21, 2016

Let Not Your Hearts be Troubled

John 14:27

Prayer: *Father, we just again, I want to pray for the Barber Family. I just want to pray for the shock I'm sure that was and we just understand that for Bob it's an incredible blessing to go to sleep on earth and wake up in heaven, and that's wonderful for him, but the family is left with the rest. So we pray for grace, we pray for peace and power for them. I just continue to pray this morning for ourselves, for us as a body, he's part of our body, when one part of the body hurts, the body hurts, and so we just pray for them. I pray, too, for the message this morning. I pray, too, for the word that we have to present, and again, let not your hearts be troubled, these are troubling times, so I pray that your Holy Spirit would be guiding my words, that you would give them your strength and your power, not my own, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

John 14:27 says: "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." You probably know this is a text that we have been looking at extensively in our communion series, and if there's

ever a text that describes people's attitudes towards our country's politics and culture, I would say this is the one, because folks are troubled and folks are afraid. We appear to be in some type of cultural free fall and many, many people have no idea where any of this is going to end, and so I want to spend some time this morning assuring you that God is still sovereign and that he is still in control and that the very events that seem to indicate that God is losing control are in fact attested to by scripture to be the unfolding of God's will.

I want to start out by giving you one example. I mean, I don't know anyone who can see what is unfolding with ISIS and with Christians in the Middle East and not wonder, God, if you are in control, how is it that your people are being so brutalized? You know, if there's one thing that you've heard me say over and over again, it's that this planet, not just one group of people, but this planet is involved in a proxy war and it's a proxy war that's been going on since the dawn of creation, and it is a war between the forces of light and the forces of darkness, and the ones who are caught up in the actual warfare, the ones who are caught in the middle is us. It's us human beings. We are the crown of God's creation, we are the only creatures that were made in God's image, and as such, it is we who are caught up in the middle of this warfare.

Jesus Christ is the one true God and Christianity is the one true religion, and it makes a very fundamental claim about the nature of this world. It says that ever since the originators of the human race Adam and Eve fell, that this world is now fallen as well. It says this is a broken, sinful world, a world that is in rebellion toward its creator. Adam and Eve defied and disobeyed God and every one of their subsequent offspring has that defiance built into them right from birth. You know, some people call it original sin, some people call it the fall of Adam, some people call it the fall of man. It is the legacy of every single human being born on the face of this earth. Now as Christians we understand that every single person who is on this earth is born literally shaking his fist at God. We understand that because the Bible states it categorically. It says this in *Ephesians 2:3*, it says: *We all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.* See, if all of us were by nature children of God's wrath, that means that all of us on some unconscious level want nothing to do with the God who created us. Even though God at great cost made our reconciliation with him possible, I mean, the second part of the verse that I just read says this, this is *Ephesians 2:4*, it says: *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ*

-- *by grace you have been saved.* So we understand that Jesus Christ took on flesh and then he lived out this perfect life and he offered up that life as a substitute for our lives of sin, and by placing our faith in his perfect sacrifice, we can stand before God clothed in his righteousness instead of our sin. And we understand that's why God can say in verse 5: *Even when we were dead in our trespasses, he made us alive together with Christ -- by grace you have been saved.*

Now Christianity calls every single person on the planet to account for the brokenness of the relationship they have with God. And God basically gives us two choices: You can either repent or you can be forever alienated from him. The simple fact is the vast majority choose to be alienated. They want their own pathway, they want their own life-style, they really want their own god. And that's why Jesus described the road to destruction as being like this incredibly beautifully paved four-lane highway and the pathway to eternal life as this rickety, barely trodden foothold. He says this in *Matthew 7:13*, he says: *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."* Now, I just want you to think for a second and understand, it stands to reason that the vast majority of the people in this country who are

on that four-lane highway, well, they have a natural antipathy, not towards Buddhism or Hinduism or even Islam in spite of its atrocity but towards Christianity, because it's the faith that has a claim on their lives. And it all goes back to this proxy war, and now this proxy war is coming down to two main players.

You know, Islam has been on everybody's hearts and minds for the past few years because of the viciousness of their attacks not just on Christianity but on all of Western civilization. And if you begin to peel back the layers as you look at this faith, you will see that radical Islam is a perfect demonic mirror of Christianity. I mean, if Satan were to design a false religion, he couldn't do any better than designing Islam, which states that there's but one God, and then it goes on to deny and denounce even the idea that that God would take on flesh in the form of Jesus, the Christ. The idea that God would stoop that low is so incredibly repulsive to radical Islam that they feel duty bound to destroy it. I find it interesting that on the political side of things we have our president telling us that the reason why he is so determined to tear down Guantanamo is that in his view it is the leading cause of recruitment to ISIS. And time and again our president has told us that ISIS uses Guantanamo to get people to sign on to Jihad because they're so outraged at the presence of this prison camp. That's not true. That simply is not so. And I can say that with

certainty because ISIS themselves have said so. You know, ISIS produces a slick glossy English language edition of their propaganda in a magazine. The magazine is known as *Dabiq*. They've named their magazine after the city that they believe Armageddon is going to take place, in great clash between the two great cultures, the two great religions. Recently the magazine came out with a definitive article on what it is that drives them, and the article was entitled "Why We Hate You and Why We Fight You." And guess what, it's got nothing to do with Guantanamo. It's got everything to do with this battle between the forces of light and darkness. The magazine's title specifically answered why they hate us and why they fight us. The title of the magazine was -- get this -- "Break the Cross." Its cover, I think I have it -- it's cover shows an Islamic soldier doing that, he's on top of the church and he's breaking down a cross. Sarah Dean writing for the *Daily Mail* said this, said: "ISIS has urged its supporters to break" -- not bear the cross -- "break the cross, and call Jesus a 'slave to Allah' in the latest issue of its propaganda magazine, *Dabiq*. The 15th issue of the twisted multi-lingual publication appears to try and convert Christians and attempts to claim that ISIS is in fact Islamic."

"Speaking of Christians, the magazine states: 'In essence, we explain why they must abandon their infidelity -- that's us -- 'and

accept Islam, the religion of sincerity and submission to the Lord of the heavens and the earth,' the magazine says. The editorial claims Jesus himself is a 'slave of Allah' and that 'the true religion of Jesus Christ is a pure monotheistic submission.' It adds that when Jesus returns in the final days he will 'wage jihad for the cause of Allah.'"

Now anyone who follows the news knows that ISIS is guilty of the most horrendous attacks on Christians. And they know that their signature for those attacks is the phrase "Allahu Akbar" which means "all glory to God." Now, I want you to back up a little bit. I want you to understand something about this symbol that we have, you see it in our lobby, we've mentioned it many, many times, this is a symbol that you see posted around the church, and it's the Arabic letter "N," and that letter stands for the term "Nazarene." And the reason why it's there is because when ISIS comes into a town, the first thing they do is they interview the elders, the church elders, and they find out where the Christians are, who they are, and where they live and then they spray paint that letter on their doors to let the other members of ISIS know that these are the people to be singled out for arrest, torture and execution.

Now you just might think when you read these things over and over again that things are just spinning out of control and there's

nothing but chaos for Christians. But what if these actions, as horrendous as they are, were something that God clearly predicted would be happening? You see, as ISIS marches through the Middle East shutting down churches and synagogues, butchering those who name the name of Christ, I can't help but think of Jesus's words in John's gospel. We just recently spoke about them, Jesus is leaving for his own crucifixion and he's warning his disciples about the terrible persecution that is going to follow, and his words are incredibly full of meaning for his disciples but they're now full of meaning for us. Listen to what Jesus said in *John 16:1*, he said: *"I have said all of these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me."* I look at that I said what Jesus said 2,000 years ago is precisely what is taking place today. ISIS is killing Christians thinking they are offering service to God. Allahu Akbar. And the reason why they think that is exactly what Jesus said, *"They have not known the Father, nor me."*

You see, I think it's easy to look around at culture and politics and think that God has somehow failed and somehow or other the forces of darkness have closed in and we see these awful things taking place in the Middle East and we also see awful things taking

place right here in our own country which appears to be in the middle of a cultural collapse. We understand that Jesus's words to both parties is *"Let not your hearts be troubled."* And he said that because God is still sovereign and he still sits on his throne. And so I want to spend some time this morning assuring you that this is still the case by pointing out to you what we see taking place in our country today as something that is not random, something that is not by chance but is all exactly what God would said he would do in response to our turning our backs on him. Now I tell people all the time, what you see today, you open up your newspaper and you get up in the morning, you read all of this stuff, you turn on the TV, what you see taking place today is the unfolding of Romans 1 before our eyes. Let me just read to you this passage so you can see what I mean.

This is Romans 1 starting at verse 18. It says: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they*

became futile if 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 decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

I submit to you that this is exactly what we are seeing today when

you open up your newspaper, this is exactly what we are seeing. And so the first question that I want to ask is, okay, what is this great sin that provokes this great wrath from God? What is this great sin that virtually all other sin springs from? Well, God doesn't leave us to guess. He says right from the start: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* Maybe we need to back up first and say, okay, we're talking about the wrath of God revealed. What is the wrath of God? Let me give you a definition by J. I. Packer. He says: "God's wrath in the Bible is never the capricious, self-indulgent, irritable, morally ignoble thing that human anger so often is. It is, instead, a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil." I think we all get that. I think if you saw a god or heard of a god that didn't care about what Hitler did, or a god that didn't care that ISIS is slaughtering people left and right, you would say there's something seriously deficient with that god's understanding. So we understand that God's wrath is absolutely necessary, but we understand it for the big, big sins, the major sins. What we don't understand is that God is transcendentally flawless and God's wrath must be extended not just to the big sins, but to all sin -- any sin, any sin that's ever committed ever by anyone anywhere is -- has to result in some type of response that is the wrath of God. I tell people all the time, you really only

have two choices in this, the wrath of God is going to fall either on you or it's going to fall on Jesus Christ who was willing to bear it for you. But here we're talking about God's wrath displayed publicly, God's corporate wrath. And God's corporate wrath has been displayed in numerous occasions in the scripture. We've seen it in the great flood with Noah, we saw it in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, we saw it with the plagues that took place in Egypt and we will see it in the bowls of wrath in Revelation, and they're all poured out on the earth in a sense. This expression of God's wrath is altogether different. It's not like any of the others, it's not an external expression like fires and floods and plagues.

As I said, it's an altogether expression of wrath but first we need to understand the why. I mean why is God's wrath revealed? Well, he says there's an objective moral evil that has produced it, and the objective moral evil that has produced God's wrath is that we have taken God's truth and suppressed it in unrighteousness. You see, our culture is evolved to the place where you can curse God, you can laugh at him, you can mock him but you cannot acknowledge him for who he is. We have suppressed the truth of God in unrighteousness and God's wrath is the result. He says: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the*

truth. 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. See what God is saying is the evidence of my presence is overwhelming and the only way that this truth can be contained the way you contain it is by suppressing it, by pushing it down. You know, the psalmist says: *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.* What God is saying is the truth about God, it's not missed, it's not somehow misunderstood. It is maliciously denied. You say how? And God says in unrighteousness.

My friend Mike likes to talk about the truth of God is like beach balls. They're held -- when you say this truth of God is suppressed in unrighteousness, he says if you ever take a beach ball and you try to hold it underwater, you can do it but it takes a lot of energy. You can't be distracted by it because the moment you're distracted, it's going to pop right back up again. So what we do is we suppress all this truth about who God is and we're constantly amazed and disturbed, at least the secular press is

amazed and disturbed, because God's is proof is constantly popping up right in their face. *John 3:36* says: *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."* People say well, why should I suffer wrath just because I don't get your Jesus? Understand, this is not -- God's not talking about simple ignorance. He is talking about willful defiant ignorance. And God says why he sees it in scripture. He says: *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.* What God is saying is go outside and just breathe his air and go stand on this earth that is clothed in his grass and look up at his trees and see the birds chasing his insects under his clouds under his sky, and then wait until the night time until you see his stars and his planets come out. And try to imagine a scenario that cuts him virtually out of the picture. Well, it took thousands and thousands of years, but we've managed to find one. We call it naturalistic evolution, and it does precisely that. It looks at the abundant physical evidence of God's divine attributes and insists that's not evidence at all. It insists that God had nothing whatsoever to do with creation and that it's not God but random chance and endless time that is responsible for all of it.

Well, God goes on to say: *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 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.* See, we here in the West, we've exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an image resembling mortal man, and actually it's not a mortal man, it's a mortal woman. We have a god and our god is a woman that we call "mother nature." I mean that's our god, I mean, if you think about it. And I have to break the news. There's no such thing as mother nature. She doesn't exist. That's a shock to a lot of people. I mean given the fact that so many want to embrace an atheistic naturalistic evolution that says that every single thing that happens in this world is a mindless accumulation of random chance happenings that produced everything we know of, it is astounding, astounding to me how tightly we cling to this idea of mother nature.

You know, I did this before in our Wednesday night class but I want to repeat some of the headlines that shout out our attachment to her. These are just some random headlines. Headline one: Clean Energy? Mother Nature Still Knows Best. That was the European Commission on Energy. Another one is: Mother Nature Fights Back Against Climate Change. That was from *Nature World News*. *Science*

Daily offered this one up: "Scientists Enhance Mother Nature's Carbon Handling Mechanism. Taking a page from Nature herself, a team of researchers developed a method to enhance removal of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and place it in the Earth's oceans for storage." God did that. Mother Nature had nothing to do with that. Lawrence Livermore Laboratory had this headline: Speeding up Mother Nature's Very Own CO2 Mitigation Process. And you can guess that there's hundreds and hundreds of these headlines. I mean, I just Googled "Mother Nature headlines." Tons of them. But there's a reason why mother nature is front and center in terms of our worship. There's a reason why mother nature is that way in spite of the fact that science itself insists that no one and nothing is responsible for everything. It is because God created all of us as creatures designed to bring honor and glory to him. And so all of us are born with this innate need to worship something. When that something becomes no one, nothing and nobody, then we're forced to invent something to fill that void, and that something is now mother nature. Mother nature is an image resembling mortal man or woman. And as C. K. Chesterton once said: "When a man stops believing in God he doesn't then believe in nothing, he believes anything."

And so God's indictment of us continues at verse 23, it says:

Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of

the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. See, God says when you suppress the truth in unrighteousness about who God really is, you just shift your focus of worship. You don't stop worshiping because you can't because God designed you that way. We are creatures designed by God for the express purpose of worship. So instead of stopping our worship, we simply exchange the glory of the immortal God for the image of a man or woman or a bird or an animal or creeping thing like an insect. I mean, we may think we have gotten way too sophisticated for that kind of crude worship but if you look at the things that people in our culture pour their hearts and their souls and their time and their money into, you'd be amazed at how many of those are represented by creatures instead of by the Creator. Ray Stedman pointed out that whether you worship the image of man that Hollywood routinely offers up or the birds, animals, and insects that are now the name of our sports teams and sports cars, well, we still have a connection to that type of worship. See, you may mock God, you may mock the worship of God while you spend your Sundays worshiping birds with names like Ravens or Cardinals or Sea Hawks or Eagles and you may get to your game by driving something else that you pour your life into with names of animals like an Impala or a Stingray or a Ram or a Mustang. Even crawling things are represented by cars named Vipers and sports teams named Hornets. Now I can allow this could be just a coincidence, maybe it's just a

coincidence that our culture is so fascinated with these names or maybe it's the outworkings of refusing to worship the Creator instead of the creature.

See, Romans 1 reads like an indictment and it reads like an indictment because essentially it is. God is holding us accountable for three different things that he refers to as willful exchanges. And in turn, we experience three different levels of God giving us up. The first exchange takes place in verse 21. It says: *Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man -- and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.* This is the first exchange. We exchange the true God for a false corrupted image. They changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man. That's what God says this is what you exchange, and here's your consequences, verse 24: *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.*

See, you have to understand the consequences of these actions. They're not like any other we've ever seen from God, I mean, people understand the wrath of God, they understand that's supposed to be earthquakes, that's supposed to be famine, that's pestilence. Well, that's not at all the case in Romans 1. What we see unfolding in Romans 1 is actually something that is far worse. It is God giving us up. In essence God is saying because of your rebellion, I am taking my hands off you and I am leaving you more and more to your own understandings of what is right and wrong. Three times we're going to hear God say, "therefore God gave them up." Understand, that's an expression of God's wrath. And each time God says it, we experience what it is like to have God take his protective hands off us.

Now, our first exchange of the true God for a false corrupted image leads to the first of God's giving us up: *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.* Well now, let me ask, have you seen this happening at all? Can we see this unfolding? Is there any proof or evidence that this is taking place? Well, how about the rise of hyper sexualization in our culture, literally the dishonoring of our bodies among ourselves. I mean, does this sound at all familiar? Is there any question at all that we are the most hyper sexualized culture in history? I mean, you can't turn on the

TV without getting smacked in the face by it. And pornography is everywhere, it's on our TVs, it's on our computers, it's even on our smart phones, just a click, that's all you need. Porn stars are now celebrities who accompany their film openings with autograph signings and the like. You know, what everybody's touting now is virtual reality, it's right around the corner. Virtual reality, you can literally have a sexual experience with something that exists only virtually. You get it with a click of a button. I submit to you that we are experiencing exactly what God said would happen when we exchange the true God for a false image. God gives us up, and he gives us up to our own false worship. Like I said, we worship things because we have to, because that's the way we were designed, but now our worship is turned inward and we're worshiping our own bodies, dishonoring them in the process. And we spend years now reveling into the dishonoring of our own bodies amongst ourselves and now that behavior has its own consequence, and we see that in verse 26. It says: *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.*

I've said many, many times that Christians really do not get the phenomenon that we see surrounding us, the homosexual phenomenon. Many Christians say, well, homosexuality is rampant and the wrath of God is coming because of it. I say that's perfectly backwards. You're not seeing what God is saying here. What Romans 1 is saying is because we have suppressed the truth in unrighteousness, the wrath of God is already here. And because of that wrath, God has given us up to dishonorable passions, therefore homosexuality is now rampant. We have entered into a moral free fall and it always progresses from bad to worse. See, there are three terrible exchanges that sinful man engages in that results in three forms of abandonment by God. The first exchange is the true God for a false image of a corruptible God. The second exchange is the truth about God for lies, and the third exchange is that of natural relations for unnatural, and each exchange that we undertake produces a corresponding abandonment by God for that exchange. And each abandonment takes us deeper and deeper into our own depravity. The result is three separate times in this scripture we come across the phrase "God gave them up," "God gave them up," "God gave them up." And the results of these abandonments are not earthquakes, they're not pestilence, they're not famine, it is God progressively removing his common grace from normal human understanding. God is removing from human beings the ability to see in the simplest terms what is incredibly obvious.

You know, when Target announces that you can now use any bathroom you want depending on what gender you now perceive yourself as, you have been given up by God. When school systems institute policies forbidding elementary school teachers from using the terms "girls" and "boys," -- which they have -- when you have this purple unicorn -- which I think is up there right now -- that is now a teaching tool that is designed to teach little ones about the fluidity of their gender, if you look at this thing, you say your gender identity consists of anything that you choose, your expression is male, female, masculine, other, sex assigned at birth as other or intersex in addition to female and male. This is demonic, let me tell you. You know, what is astounding to me is this unicorn teaches little ones that the gender that they were born with is only a minor biological construct. You know, a reasonable person is going to look at this and conclude we've lost our minds. What in the world has happened? We Christians are constantly accused of being anti science. The folks who produced that are not only anti science, they're anti common sense. I say this in all seriousness, this is the wrath of God displayed in that type of insanity.

I once coined the term "judicial blindness" and I say it is the penalty imposed by God of having even the simplest ability to

discern between what is obviously right and obviously wrong taken away. And the principle's in *Luke 8:18*, it says: *"Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."* I submit to you that that's already happened. I submit to you that the scripture contains the result, it's *Isaiah 5:20*. It says: *Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight! God's ultimate punishment is leaving us to our own insanity.*

I mean, you know why our country is embroiled in a battle over whether or not people can use the -- the bathroom not assigned to their gender? It's because we're collectively losing our minds. So the question is why is so much of this then, why is it all centered around sexuality? Why is it so much having to do with sexual sins and in particular homosexuality? Well, each exchange represents God's natural order being exchanged for something that is unnatural, something that's against nature. I mean think of the scriptures, it says: *(We) changed the glory of the incorruptible God to the image made like corruptible man.* Well, that's exchanging a real God for a fake image. Then it says *(we) exchange the truth about God for a lie.* That's exchanging truth for lies.

Now it says: *For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise.* That's exchanging natural passions for unnatural. See, there's a reason why God chose homosexuality as a sin to highlight because it fundamentally represents turning the natural order upside down, turning the natural order to the unnatural. And this is what God says in verse 26: *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.* Now understand why Paul chose this as an example. Kevin DeYoung wrote a wonderful little book called *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality*, and in it he describes the reason why Paul explained it this way, it says this: "In Paul's mind, same-sex sexual intimacy is an especially clear illustration of the idolatrous human impulse to turn away from God's order and design. Those who suppress the truth about God as revealed in nature suppress the truth about themselves written in nature. Homosexual practice is an example on a horizontal plane of our vertical rebellion against God. Homosexual behavior is a sin, not according to who practices it or by what motivation they seek it, but because that act itself, as a truth-suppressing exchange, is contrary to God's good design."

So just to sum, we have these three different exchanges, we have the exchange of truth for lies, a true God for a false image, and a natural passion for an unnatural, and they provoke three great abandonments by God. Verse 24: *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity.* Verse 26: *For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions;* and verse 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.* This is God's final abandonment. This is what brings this awful series to a close. And the final abandonment is an abandonment to a debased mind. This is what he says in verse 28: *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 decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.*

See, Paul is completing this passage with a discussion of the ultimate sign of God's abandonment. And what he's doing here, he

describes 21 different sins, and I guarantee you, every one of us in this room can identify with some of those sins. Been there, done that. But he ends verse 32 with someone who not only practices the sins, but he has no guilt, he has no remorse whatsoever; in fact, having committed these sins, he's now standing on the sidelines cheering along his fellow rebellious ones in their sin. He's describing someone who is beyond rebuke, someone who absolutely refuses to hear God at all, and he's describing the end product of our rebellion, the end product of our suppressing the truth. It's the end product of God giving us up. See, hearts that have grown so cold that no sin is too great or too small is what we are seeing. And what we are seeing is that all sin now meets with the hearty approval of those who are engaged in it. This is what we as a culture have become.

The *New York Times* recently got wind of this passage and then proceeded to come up with a news story that perfectly illustrates exactly what this hard-heartedness entails. Alex Griswold writing about this wrote in *Mediaite*, wrote this, this is the headline, says: "New York Times Misunderstands Bible Verse, Thinks Republican Called for Gays to be Executed." It goes on to say: If you read the New York Times Thursday, you'd be shocked to discover that recently a Republican congressman read to his colleagues a New Testament verse written by the Apostle Paul calling for the

execution of gays. No doubt you'd be doubly shocked if you are a Christian or even have a passing familiarity with the New Testament, since such a verse does not actually exist. According to the Times" -- this is the New York Times -- "a Republican congressman read his colleagues a Bible verse from Romans that calls for the execution of gays." Their source for that accusation is a May complaint by the gay rights organization Human Rights Watch: 'HRC Calls on Republican Leadership to Condemn Lawmaker's Attacks on LGBT People as "Worthy of Death."' Neither the Times or HRC names the verse in question, but according to *Roll Call*, Georgia Congressman Rick Allen read from Romans 1:18-32." The article goes on to quote the very passage we're looking at this morning, and it notes in particular in bold, it says this: The verse 32 that we're looking at right now: *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.* Now, the article goes on to say: "It's that bolded section that appears to be the source of the misunderstanding. Yes, it says that those who practice the listed sins 'deserve death' but that's because Christians believe that everyone deserves death. That's kind of the whole point of our religion: Through the mercy and sacrifice of Jesus, we can avoid the punishment we justly deserve. If HRC or the New York Times had actually sat down for a second and listened to what Allen said, it would have been painfully obvious that it

was not a call for execution. The condemnations of homosexuality come alongside condemnations of those who envy, lie, boast, cheat, gossip, disobey their parents, fail to love others, etc. You would have to believe that for the past two thousands years, Christian teaching has called for the execution of every person who has ever lived. The Federalist's Mollie Hemingway (who first pointed out the error, and masterfully so) explains just how common the phrase is in Christianity, and how two minutes of research could have avoided this mistake: The 'worthy of death' phrase (in my Bible, it's 'deserve to die') is simply a restating of a basic teaching of Christianity. Let's hop on over to Romans 6:23 'For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.' This is the good news of Christianity! We're all sinners who deserve death, but in Christ Jesus, we receive forgiveness and eternal life."

Now, you might be saying to yourself at this point, okay, ISIS is butchering us, God has abandoned us and even the New York Times is totally misquoting us, so why is this message entitled "Let Not Your Hearts Be Troubled?" Well, allow me to point out the only two choices we really have here, okay? We can believe as the -- those who in the secular world like to believe, that these things randomly happen and that everyone involved from a lowly laborer up to the president himself just has to learn that these random

occurrences happen and they apparently are happening in a way that has turned ugly towards us. We can believe that or you can believe that a sovereign God who rules both heaven and earth and whose ways are far, far above our ways is still in charge and still in control of this world, a world that just happens, for all intents and purposes, to look like it's spinning out of control. Now, the first question I would ask is in what direction does the evidence point? Well, I can tell you this, I see in the very pages of scripture Jesus warning us in the gospel of John precisely what we see ISIS doing. I see Paul in the book of Romans describing to an uncanny tee exactly what we see unfolding before us politically and culturally. And I see in the New York Times an organization that prides itself on its sophistication, I see it reduced to a laughingstock by the simple wisdom of believers who are willing to push back. I see God's fingerprints all over this.

I let not my heart be troubled because I also see a solution to the abandonment that we are experiencing right now. I believe it's God's answer for us, and I've been disappointed to hear people dispute this, this has now become something that people argue over and it's disputed because people claim, well, these words were originally addressed only to God's people the Jews and only in the Old Testament and the United States is not these people, so it doesn't apply to us. True enough, it applied specifically to the

Jews in the Old Testament. But the principle of what I'm going to read to you applies, and the principle is that the health of the nation is directly attributable to the health of God's people within that nation. So I can see precisely what God said to his people to our people in 2 Chronicles 7:14, he says: *If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.* You see, the key to fixing what's wrong with America is not found in Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton. It's found right here in you and me. It's found among God's people, and God still has his hands on his people. And it is God's people alone who have the power to turn the country around. So let not your hearts be troubled. Let's pray.

Father God, again we can look around and just see all of the events and just throw up our hands and say, "It's over, we've lost," or we can see between the lines and we can compare scripture with scripture and we can see patterns evolving. We can see patterns taking place that illustrate that you have not at all abandoned us and exactly what you have said would happened is exactly what we see happening. Lord, enable that to give us the courage to go on, the courage to trust in your sovereign hand, in your Holy Spirit's power enough to trust that we are the ones who are called by your

name who need to pray and seek your face and turn from our wicked ways. We trust that you will then hear from heaven and forgive our land. I pray that you would give each and every one of us the ability not just to believe ourselves but to share it with those who so desperately need to hear it. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.