

Romans 1, Part 2

Last week we talked about how the Gospel is Good News, because it brings hope and salvation:

Paul said in Romans 1:16 (say with me) - *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes . .*

The Gospel is good news, but to fully understand and respond to the Gospel, we need to know first what we're saved from. That's our discussion this morning. (This is one of the toughest passages on scriptures to teach and preach, so we need to pray).

Verses 18-20 - read the first three verses.

So - the Gospel is good news, but from what is it that we're saved?

He answers that in these verses. And here's what he's saying – the wrath of God is directed toward humanity. We were created good - in His image - but sin entered through Adam – and now, because of sin, we have done many things to rebel against the goodness and holiness of God.

Let's talk about what means when he says “the wrath of God”

There's one word for “wrath” in Greek (**thumos**) that explosive, irrational rage, like a temper tantrum – this is like an alcoholic father – you're not sure what kind of mood he's in. Thank God this is not the word Paul uses. Because God is not childish and moody in the way he exercises his wrath.

There's another Greek word – **Orge** – which is something that steadily builds over a long period of time and is to be directed toward something intentionally – the justice of a just God.

So here's the thing – God does not lose his temper and fly off the handle in an irrational rage. No, God's wrath is a firm and settled hostility toward sin, whereby he directs his perfect justice toward evil. (You want to worship a God like this by the way).

You say – I just want a God who's grace and love. That's not really the God you want, because if that's all you get, you don't have a God that's willing to do anything about **the atrocities of life** like the **Holocaust** or **the sex trafficking of children** or **elder abuse**.

God's not just a big teddy bear up in the sky! NO! - you want a God who has a measured and firm hostility toward evil and sin.

But the problem is – if you accept the God of the Bible, you also have to accept that you have at times participated in the same evil his wrath is directed towards.

So what we see is – God's wrath is directed toward humanity because – verse 18 – we have **suppressed the truth of God** – and that means to push something down.

It's like a game we played in the pool as kids, we would take a **beach ball** and swim to the bottom with the ball and push it down, push it down – the idea is it's hard to push it down but we keep trying – it's trying to surface, but we keep trying to push it down – and Paul says that's what we do with the truth and evidence of God. We push against the awareness of God all around us. And here's how we do it – we deny what's **plainly obvious**.

Paul says there are two things everybody ought to know from nature (and note, he doesn't say from the Bible). People who don't even have a Bible ought to know at least two things, because God has left his fingerprints everywhere – that God is eternal, and he is divine (it's what's called a natural law argument).

I like the way Max Lucado put it: “Nature is God's first missionary to man.”

God has made himself clear, even without a Bible. (That's why if you go all the way back to the caveman and look at cave drawings, there are images of people worshipping).

Paul is saying that every rational human ought to know about God, but the reason they don't is because you don't want to!

(Paul share the perspective of the psalmists – Psalm 19:1 – “The heavens declare the glory of God.”

God has put his stamp on his, because we are made in his image and likeness– but the problem isn’t that God hides himself from us and makes himself not known to us – the problem is we don’t want it to be true, because if it were true it would require us to repent and it would require us to worship.

(Everybody take a deep breath in – take a deep breath out – you’ve breathed in a perfect combination of gasses that keep you alive. And if it were a fraction of an inch off, you would die. And to say it all came about by accident is for us to basically prove this passage true – we suppress the truth).

For something to come into existence like the universe, there must be something else that exists to bring the world into existence.

(And not just the cosmos, but our own consciences).

The fact that we have an inner sense of right and an inner sense of wrong – could never be attributed to evolution. It’s not physical – it’s spiritual – it’s something no other creature has.

When a lion eats a gazelle, it’s not called homicide – it’s called lunch. Right?

And yet when we take the life of another human being, in all cultures of human history there’s something that says it’s wrong.

Everybody knows murder is wrong. Buddhists believe its wrong, Confucianism believes its wrong, Shintoism believes its wrong. So if you don’t accept those fundamental truths, it’s because you choose not to.

And so God is the divine lawgiver, and his divine image is in each of us. (We know right and wrong).

But what have we done? We have suppressed the truth of God.

**It’s not there’s insufficient evidence to convince is that there is a God, it’s that if God does convince us he’ll probably have a say in how

we live our lives. He’ll probably have a say in our sexuality, he’ll probably have a say in how we spend our time, he’ll probably have a say in what we put in our body through our mouth of what we take into our hearts through our eyes and ears. He’ll probably have a say in how we spend our money or treat our neighbor.

And instead of submitted to the God who is readily know, we come up with our own modern scientific world view.

We professed to be wise, but Paul says we’ve become fools.

Verse 21-23

What else have we done to incur the wrath of God? **We have failed to acknowledge God.**

(In other words, we don’t want to obey his rules, we don’t want to obey his commands, we don’t want to obey how he says this life is to be lived, and **we don’t want to give him credit for his gifts – we don’t give thanks**).

So when you're little, all the teachers and adults and all the parents are always telling us to say “thank you.” “Don't take that without saying thank you.” It’s the courteous thing to do. It’s bad manners not to say, “thank you.”

But the problem with the world is – we don’t say “thank you.”

You know what plagiarism is, right? It’s when we claim intellectual property that’s not our own.

You know why it's so severely punished? Because it's not giving thanks (in other words, it's claiming that you came up with this, and it's not acknowledging the fact you didn't come up with it, that you got it from over there).

And so ingratitude is **living under the illusion** that we are self-sufficient, that we can call the shots, that we decide what is right or wrong, that we decide how to live.

We hate the idea that we would be dependent on someone (which means we would have to be thankful). If that were true, we’d be

obligated, and therefore would lose control. We would have to be accountable, and that's not what we want to do.

We want to take the gifts of relationships and the gift of nature and the gifts of sex and food and we want to worship all of those things - but we don't want to worship the God who gave us all of those things.

We say to God, "I want to be king, I want to be in charge – I want my will not yours." (which goes all the way back to Eden). So when we fail to acknowledge God and thank God, Paul said "our thinking becomes futile."

We try to explain how truth is possible without God. (There's a phrase going on right now – "live your truth.")

Which says that truth is relative – go our and live your truth!

But how can you live it if there's no such thing as a common truth. That's societal chaos. That's division, disunity, and collapse. (It's like, if we all just drove down the highway according to our own rules – there'd be a pile up).

When we reject God, our thinking becomes futile and our hearts darkened – which means our affections and our moral judgments become tainted, become distorted, become confused.

And he says – verse 22 - "professing to be wise they become fools." I don't think it's an accident, you go to any major university and walk the halls, hang out with academia – smart people with advanced degrees – things like atheism and agnosticism and universalism are seen as the pinnacle of enlightenment. You're smart if you just deny the existence of God.

So things like creationism, religion – those things are seen as laughable and backwards, out of date.

So we've claimed a certain kind of intellectualism that is completely absent from creator God.

In our pride and arrogance we've considered ourselves wise, even though the epitome of foolishness is to ignore the basic cause of all existence, and that is God.

Paul again agrees with the Psalmist - "The fool has said in his heart, there is no God."

**But it's not just those who deny the existence of God. Anytime someone says, "I know the Bible says this but . . ." We're doing the exact same thing.

I know we're supposed to get married, but . . .

I know this is how I'm supposed to use my money, but . . .

What we're doing is, we're looking at the commands of God and saying, "I'm just a little bit smarter than you, God. Your commands are asking too much of me, and you don't know what it's like to be me, so I'm gonna do what I want to do – I'm smarter than you."

Here's the thing – we were created to worship. But if we choose to suppress the truth of God, you're left without God.

So what do we do? Because we were created to worship, if we refuse to worship the true God **we are left to manufacture gods for ourselves – and this is what we've done. (John Calvin said, "The human heart is an idol factory.")**

Actually it says – they created images resembling mortal man. So - what's the **first on the list** of things we've created to worship? Ourselves!

We've created things that look like us, talk like us, tell us more of what we want to know and we want to hear and what we agree with before we even hear them speak, so we've set ourselves, our desires, our intellect, and our own will at the center of our own universe.

And he says - **secondly**, "From there we descended so low as to worship birds and animals and creeping things."

So what is a creeping thing? It's a bug.

So here's what Paul is affirming – one of the great themes of the Bible is that idolatry leads to a hardening of the heart to dehumanization. So – if you worship things, you'll become a thing. (That's what the scriptures teach).

You will become hard – you will become as blind and deaf as the idol.

You will actually become less of a human being, less and less personal, more hardened and more blind.

(Listen – there's hundreds of references to that in the Bible, but here's one – Psalm 135:15-18

The idols of the nations are silver and gold, made by human hands. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. They have ears, but cannot hear, nor is there breath in their mouths. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.

What's he saying? If we worship created things, our wills, our minds, our emotions will slowly erode away. We will find ourselves in a place where we become less and less human, less and less personal, less and less sensitive.

The phrase “sinful desires” means something akin to “super desires” or “epicenter.” It means uncontrolled desires, over the top desires.

It means that you don't just worry, but it's paralyzing worry, not normal kind of anger, but out of control anger – and therefore you are more like an animal responding to instinct, or a robot following a program.

And so we have this tendency to say – well that's someone in the rain forest that does that kind of thing). “No idols here! “

If you don't think we're guilty of idolatry more than any other culture on the face of the earth you're not paying attention.

Because here's what we do as Americans – we attribute all manner of value, all manner of worth, all manner of meaning – we look to things each and every day to save us other than God, and we constantly live

frustrated and angry at each other because the things that we've set up in the place of God don't deliver and they don't save us.

One of the things we've done – we set up money and lifestyle in the place of God. We say, “if I could get to this certain bracket – if I could get the house, get the car – then my life is going to be fixed. What are we doing?

We're saying to that idol, I want you to save me and fix me. The only problem is – it can't. It never can. If you think it can, go to the grocery store and read the magazines - lifestyles of the rich and famous – are those people happy? No, they're a train wreck.

Some of you are wondering why money is not fixing you. It never can because it was never designed to. It's an idol.

For some of us, it's not that – it's entertainment. I'm amazed at what we will do for entertainment that we will never do for God. We'll sit through a movie – legs crossed because we've got to get to the bathroom but we can't miss the scene at the end – but if we're encourage to participate in a bible study group, we don't have the time for it.

We want to be entertained – and why? Because some of us what an escape from the life we live now – we are looking for entertainment to fix us, to save us, to rescue us from some brokenness inside us, and I just need you to hear me – 8 hours of Netflix is not going to fix what's broken inside of you.

Entertainment is a terrible idle.

For some of us it's sexuality, it's romance. Becker, a Jewish atheist, who wrote the that book The Denial of Death, said when western civilization removed the idea of God from the collective consciousness they were left with a vacuum and they filled that vacuum with sexuality and romance.

And we elevated sexuality and romance to a place that is completely unprecedented in any culture anywhere in all of human history.

We put sex and romance on a high pedestal, we essential sing worship songs to that person we think can give us meaning – you know the John Legend sing, “I give you all of me.”

It’s a worship song. And we say there’s a Mr. right out there somewhere – he’s gonna fix me, he’s gonna save me, give my life meaning and purpose and fulfilment, and then we marry that guy and we find out he’s a sinner and needs God’s grace. And we say, Oh, I must have married the wrong person,” and we divorce him and get with someone else.

For some it’s fame or popularity – we ourselves want to be worshipped by someone – if I can just get enough followers and likes on Facebook people will worship me and believe I have significance.

we worship other human beings – it could be government, it could be politics (I’ll skip that one today). It could be food, it could be football, it could be an ATV, it could be guns, it could be a boat, it could be alcohol, it could be gold and silver, it could be a retirement account. (I like to garden – that can become my God).

But if you want to know what your idol is, you need to ask yourself – **“outside of work, how much time and money go into this thing at the expense of other things?”** (Like relationships, and compassion, and caring, and serving, and worship, and time?)

If I want to know where your idols are, we can just see where you spend your time and your money – because Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there will be your heart also.”

So if that thing has all your time and attention, that thing is your idol. Sorry!

If you’re clutching that koozie and you say, “You’ll have to pry it from my cold dead fingers” – if not willing to step back and say, “Have I been putting way too much stock in this thing – that’s your idol.”

So - when I spend 8 hours on Netflix, does that make me a better wife?

When I spend all my time looking at this Instagram influencer, how does my heart feel – do I feel more empty or more like loving Jesus and being content with the things I have?

Anything that you publicly testify your allegiance to – that has your worship, that is your idolatry, that is your allegiance – and so what Paul is saying is – “we are ALL guilty of exchanging the glory of God for the worship of idols.”

Let’s look at next part – 24-25

This is probably some of the most uncomfortable scripture we will ever read out loud in.

Paul says – God gives you what you want as an act of judgement. (This is the Burger King wrath – have it your way. Right?)

You say, “I want my sin,” and God says, “Ok, have your sin.”

How is that act of judgement? You say, “I want to do what I want to do, so thank you God for letting me do what I want to do.” (But here’s what you don’t see – that’s the worse thing that can happen to you. Because the worse thing God can do for a sinner is to hand them over to the sins they want to commit so they can keep on sinning.

Why? Because sin blinds us. Sin hardens our hearts. Sin leads us to proudly and willingly abandon what is honorable and holy.

(You know how I know – because in spending time with a friend recently who has wrestled with addiction, said you take that first pill, you don’t think about the fact that it will lead to 5 years later stealing from my grandparents. And losing my kids and everything I own and me being homeless.” (He wasn’t governed only by himself, but by a third party).

It starts with – “I have control over this” – but sin always takes you further than you want to go and keeps you longer than you’re willing to say and takes more than you’re willing to pay.”

Why? Because sin blinds us. So when God hands us over to sin, that’s an act of judgment. (God’s desire is not to destroy us, but he doesn’t

control us – and hopefully – God’s hope – is that the consequences will drive us home before it’s too late – and in the end, though he hands us over, even the consequences, though an act of judgement, are an act of mercy).

Why does God do that? Because we’ve changed the truth of God for a lie. And what is the lie? That God is **not worthy** of our allegiance, not worthy of our praise, and not worthy of our obedience. That we know better than him. But we don’t really want him – and so we don’t have him.

We do what we want to do – and so when we exchange the truth for a lie we serve the creature – ourselves and idols – rather than the creator. That’s what he says in verse 25.

Jordan Peterson, the Canadian psychologist *who’s not a Christian*, says it well: **“There are no true atheist, practically speaking. There are those who acknowledge the gods they are worshipping and those who don’t.”**

And what he begins in **verse 26-28** is something that is extremely counter cultural – and as we read it you may squirm a little and think, “Surely this can’t mean what it actually says.”

So there’s three possible explanation for Paul’s explanation of homosexual activity:

1. One is very much in vogue in progressive theological circles – and that’s when we read this we just need to understand that Paul’s a homophobe. And so we read through the lens of love because we’re enlightened, educated – it’s 2024 – which means we get to pick out the parts that are scripture and the parts that aren’t scripture.

Clearly Paul is intolerant, so we should just skip passages like this. There’s only one problem – Paul is an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:1).

An apostle was someone’s designated representative, so when Paul was speaking he’s not speaking the opinions of Paul, he’s speaking the Word of God. If we start doubting Paul’s position as an apostle, we also start doubting Peter’s position as an apostle, because Peter said “you should listen to the writings of Paul.”

So if Paul has it wrong and Peter has it wrong, you’re left without a NT. And what you’re left with is your own emotions, your own feelings, your own sentiment – you are the final judge and authority of what is right and wrong, in which case you don’t need the Bible because you’re your own God.

2. Then there’s the second view that some of us have heard – that when Paul is talking about this he’s not talking about monogamous, loving same sex couples. He’s talking about promiscuity, temple prostitution, sexual assault. (He would not be aware of such relationships as we have today).

But there’s only one problem – when you do a cursory study of the Roman Empire, you will find that this is impossible. Because Emperor Nero actually married another man just a few years after this was written. You study the historian Plutarch, you study the philosophers, you find out that same-sex marriage was an open and celebrated part of Roman society.

You saying that Paul as a Roman citizen would have no clue about that is like saying someone lives in San Francisco is not aware of homosexuality. Of course, Paul would have been aware. So what are we left with if those two things aren’t so?

3. It means that this passage of scripture means exactly what it says. In fact – Paul’s description here is framed by Genesis and by Jesus himself: “A man will leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24, Matt. 19:5, Mark 10:7).

When Paul is referring to homosexuality, he's not saying it's the worse sin of all (in fact there is much more in the Bible about heterosexual sin – much more) – he's not saying it's unforgivable and unredeemable and worse than every other sin, he's referring to homosexuality as an example of humanity prioritizing desire over God's design.

(I think he leads with this for two reasons:

First - homosexuality is cited, not because it's far worse than every other sin, it's cited because it's the clearest evidence of God's order being rejected.

Paul makes a natural law argument. Same sex activity, Paul says, is according to nature. What he means is, physically speaking, the male body is designed to fit the female body. And so when you don't have that, it's different from how nature has designed you.

Tim Keller puts it this way: homosexuality does not promote **“human flourishing.”**

What's he saying? Because God has designed human sexuality, designed our bodies, designed us in his image as male and female, the result of that union is the creation of life.

And so human sexuality is good. It's a gift from God for which we should be thankful.

But it's a blessing only when it is practiced in the context of one man and one woman in a committed relationship of marriage. Outside of that – it is either sinful, disordered, or both.

And because we have used intimacy recklessly and carelessly in our culture today, and now we have millions of people who have no stable father or mother to live them and raise them.

But lest we feel judgmental and pompous about this – we need to be careful – because sin is sin, and sin is a problem for all of us.

You see – any time you click on a web site that takes you away from God plan for one man and one woman in a committed relationship to honor God, you're guilty of the same thing.

When I, David Baker, have lust in your heart, I'm guilty of the same thing.

So we need to be very careful, because most of the folks I've talked with have very significant struggles of the heart, and nobody wakes up one morning and says, “Hey, I think I just want to rebel against God.”

Most people don't feel like they even chose their desires, so most people struggling with same sex attraction are dealing with deep, intense shame, and many of them unanswered prayer because they have gone before God and asked God to take these feelings away, so first and foremost.

When we talk about these things, we don't need to take the position of judge, we need to understand that the conversation needs to happen with compassion, with understanding, with love.

Because here's the reality – the curse of sin has brought upon humanity corruption.

And all of us are afflicted with corruption – but the thing is, we're all afflicted with different dimensions of that corruption, therefore we don't always choose our weaknesses and our struggles.

Some of us have a natural bent toward anger and jealousy and addiction – we didn't choose it – some of us a natural bent toward sexual sin – and the reality is – it's all coming from the same central place, indulging our desires and placing self on the throne of our life instead of God on the throne.

That central sin is manifest in different people differently, which means none of us can stand in judgement over those with different sins.

Look at the other corruptions Paul lists – 29-31 – he talks about envy, murder, strife, disobedient to parents, right? It's the same central problem. It's that we want our way, our desire and our will over God's.

Because we don't want to acknowledge God, God has given us over to a debased mind – that means a mind that doesn't form right judgments, lacks wisdom and empathy, is selfish.

It's not only that we commit sin, but we commit sin that we know is wrong – so we do it willingly. (You know its wrong to tell a lie before you tell it – but you tell it. You know you shouldn't pass on gossip about another person, but you do.)

And we often applaud and encourage others who live a sinful life (which is the pinnacle of depravity – we applaud the sins of others).

I think verse 32 begs the question – what am I watching, engaging in, celebrating, that is literally something I would have blushed at and been appalled at in my past?

We all know – it's no fun for someone to go out and drink by themselves – you want other people doing it with you, right? You don't feel so bad when other people are doing it with you.

But I think it's important to say this: as Christ followers, we must never approve of evil. (And that means - don't rewrite the Christian religion to accommodate sexual sin, don't rewrite the Christian religion to accommodate whatever is the most progressive and creative idea.

Otherwise God will say to us, 'Okay. I'll give you what you want, and what you want is not me.'

Now – what if that's how we ended? How is this good news? We started talking about the Gospel – but we read this and feel horrible – it's like the season finale of This is Us – you just want to cry and eat ice cream. Right? How is this good news?

This is good news, because before you will truly want a Savior, you must first realize what he saved you from. You have to realize just what he saved you from and just want He's done in saving you.

We have to understand – that we are so marred by sin, it can only take an act of God to rescue from that. That's precisely what Jesus came for – and this is good news because Romans doesn't end here. Praise God!

If you really want the good news – the power of God for salvation – first you have to digest the bad news.

When the Bible gives us the bad news first, it's always for a reason.

We've got to digest the bad news. Here's the bad news – before you met Jesus or if you are living your life without Jesus, you are guilty and under wrath. There's not a single person not guilty in sin. The bad news is without Jesus you fail to honor God because you have declared yourself smarter than God.

The bad news is – you've worshipped and given your life over to false idols that can't save you.

And it's different for all of us – for some of us it shows up as an anger problem, for some it shows up in addiction, for some of us it shows up in a sexual sin – but it's the same thing, and for all of us, before we met Jesus Christ, we knew that our sin was wrong – not only do we delight in practicing our sin, we also want to applaud other people who engage in the same sin or worse.

Why? Because it makes it seem less bad.

But here's the best news possible – Jesus didn't die for good people. (I mean, if there's any one of us still holding on the delusion that we're a pretty good guy – better than everyone else – the Gospel is not for you. The Gospel is only for those who, through humility, can admit that in me dwells no good thing.

As the Bible says in Romans 5:8 – “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”