

XVI. Contending and Defending the Faith in Biblical Perspective
Contending and Contenders—Defending and Defenders
“The Theological State of the Union”
Romans 1:16–32
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November 9, 2014 – Morning Sermon

I’m going to open this study by just reading the first two verses of the text I will be covering in Romans 1:16-34. This is God’s Word. It’s the truth. Romans 1:16-17 says [16] *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may this His Word be preached for you.

I need you to prayerfully receive what I am about to preach and for me, the preacher. This is a little intimidating. The two presidents where my two degrees come from are sitting in our congregation today and they could probably revoke it in a heartbeat after this study. I also want you to be praying for me because I have an ambitious task before me and I want to do it in a timely manner. This ambitious task is to continue our series in contending and defending the faith and I’m using this to set up our conference on the “Real State of the Union” happening today and tomorrow. So the title I have picked for this study is “The Theological State of the Union.”

Why are we doing this series on contending and defending the faith? It is for a couple of reasons. Satan has two very repeatable strategies revealed in the Word of God. One is the strategy of intimidation of believers and the church to silence, paralyze them and cause them to question their ability and effectiveness. It may be intimidation through state or cultural persecution or ridicule and mockery. There are all kinds of ways in which Satan takes the culture shapers and people in positions of power in this world in an attempt to intimidate the church. The second strategy Satan uses in concert with the first one like a hook is infiltration where he comes into the church, sometimes by wolves in sheep’s clothing and other times by sheep in wolves clothing. So sometimes it’s through believers with false teaching and other times it’s false teachers with false teaching but he infiltrates as Jude says with people who creep in.

What is our response to these strategies? We have two apostolic designed responses. We are to respond to his intimidation with I Peter 3:13-15 in mind. This passage says we are to always be ready to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts and always being ready to give an account of the hope that is within us when asked so that we are to respond to intimidation by defending the faith with diligence and determination but not personal defensiveness. How do we handle infiltration? The key text for handling this is Jude 1:3. Jude 1:3 says [3] *Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.* So we are to respond to infiltration by contending for the faith with conviction and clarity but not with personal contentiousness.

You have two objectives every time you are contending and defending the faith. One objective is to win the day for truth and two is to win the person that you are speaking with. You do this by relying on the Holy Spirit, the Word of God and intercessory prayer. We have used a number of illustrations from Scripture to show how this has been done. Just like we saw Paul has he contended and defended for the faith when he went to Athens, now we're going to see how he lays out defending and contending for the faith as he goes to the military capital of might, the capital of political power and the capital of moral decadence, Rome. Athens was the intellectual capital of the world for 500 plus years and Paul goes to contend and defend the faith at Mars Hill.

Now he is on his way to Rome and he has never been there and to set up his ministry he sends this letter which is a tightly woven exposition of the Gospel. You will see how tightly this is when we read it and you'll continually see him say 'for...for...for...therefore' just to get certain points across. Everything is tightly woven together throughout this entire exposition of the Gospel. We are going to look at an opening refrain. Mount Everest for me is the book of Romans when I think of each book of the Bible for each book has its peak but this is one of the highest to me. If I was to think of a musical composition comparison to the book of Romans it would be the Messiah with the Hallelujah Chorus peaking at Romans 8:28-39. I love the book of Romans in all of its majesty and glory.

I am using Romans not only to continue our series but in order to set up what we'll look at in this conference of the Real State of the Union but in this study I want to show you the Theological State of the Union. You will hear in this study the Biblically informed assessments of God's assessments of any and all culture. God is describing for you the way of any nation that is devoid of the transforming and restraining power of the Gospel of grace. He is unfolding it step by step. If transforming, redeeming and restraining power of the Gospel of grace is absent then this is the inevitable journey of every nation. It was the way of the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks and the way of the Romans until the Gospel came and gave some life for a period of time to Rome. Historians even say that nations aren't destroyed from the outside but the inside and now you're getting an inside look as to what is happening on the inside.

There is Good News described for us in Romans 1:16-17 and if that is not there or set aside or rejected or moved out then what happens to that culture is now unfolded for you in this passage. I think passage can be described as a song. I'd like for you to think of two songs. There is a glorious hallelujah song of life in Romans 8:28-39, the Hallelujah Chorus. Mendelsohn wrote the funeral march and this passage is that funeral march, the song of death and despair. You don't know how important and glorious the Good News is until you understand the bad news. That's why Paul introduces the Good News but before he expounds on it he tells you why it is the Good News.

Romans 1:16-17 says [16] *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

[17] *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."* I like the way Al Mohler said that the phrase 'For I am not ashamed...' is an interesting way to express something you love. When I get back to the end I'll tie this phrase back in for you. I love my wife but I don't go around saying 'I'm not ashamed of my wife.' There is a reason Paul says it this way.

Number one is that Paul is not ashamed of the Gospel. There is something called the Gospel that is defined and revealed in the Word of God. The second reason he is not ashamed of the Gospel is because it is the power of God. Thirdly, in it, referring to the Gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed. The Gospel is definitive. It is the power of God. It is the righteousness of God. Here is a fourth thing. The Gospel is absolutely inclusive of any and all who come to Christ – Jew, Gentile, rich, poor, black, white etc. – for it does not matter where you are demographically, sociologically or whatever for any and all who come to Christ will be saved.

The Gospel is also discriminating for it is only those who come to Christ that are saved. Everyone who believes is saved but those who don't believe cannot be saved. So instead of the revelation of the Gospel of life for those apart from that Gospel there is something else that is about to be revealed and it's the wrath of God. Before I come back to this matter of the Gospel I want you to understand the way of condemnation if you are not embracing the way of salvation. I want to be very clear with you. I am sending this on ahead for this is what I'll be saying as I walk through this capital of might, power and decadence. Here is what you need to know.

This song of death and despair has three stanzas to it and each one will go to a deeper minor key if you were trying to put music to it. Each stanza has two refrains that are inseparably woven together. It will say 'they exchanged' and 'God gave them over.' So let's start by looking at Romans 1:18.

Romans 1:18-22 says [18] *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] 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. [21] 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. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools.*

He starts by saying the wrath of God is revealed. When we talk about the wrath of God we always run ahead to when Jesus returns the second time bringing judgment and on that day the wrath of God will descend upon all who are apart from Christ and who have fallen short of the glory of God. When He came the first time He came bearing judgment. Paul is telling us something else of the wrath of God here. So while the second coming of Christ is a day of the unmixed wrath of God for all eternity, in time God's wrath is already being revealed. Just as He has revealed the work of salvation, the righteousness of God and the Gospel, He is revealing now you're need of that Gospel because He is revealing His wrath.

Where is He revealing His wrath? He is revealing it against any and all ungodliness and unrighteousness. That ungodliness and unrighteousness is coming from men and women born with a sin nature so they suppress the truth in unrighteousness. What needs to be known about God and His glory is all around you but man because he is a sinner will suppress the truth in unrighteousness, even though they knew God. When a baby is born they already have a knowledge of God and will see the glory of God in creation and has the glory of God within them but that child is also born with a sin nature so they will suppress that in unrighteousness.

I received my doctorate from RTS and fooled Westminster with my MDiv and here I was hearing the teaching of R.C. Sproul as we were talking about certain questions that are always asked. A question was asked “What happens to the innocent natives?” Sproul answered “All those innocent natives are going to heaven but there is only one problem, there are no innocent natives.” We are all guilty. Creation shouts the majesty of God. The creation declares His glory. It’s inside of us, outside of us and we suppress the truth in unrighteousness. We don’t have a mind problem. We have a heart problem. Therefore our mind is darkened and when our mind is darkened we will give ourselves awards for wisdom but in reality professing to be wise we become fools. That’s where we are.

What happens when the Gospel of grace to the glory of God has not come or is rejected? What is the inevitable movement of the individual and the culture as it rejects it? So Paul now starts the first stanza. Romans 1:21-23 says [21] *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. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

Here is your first exchange. They exchanged God’s glory for the charade of idolatry and exalt themselves by declaring glory on that, that cannot give glory. They then begin to descend into the consequences of that and God gives them over. What does He give them over to? Romans 1:24 says [24] *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.* God gives this present day revelation of His wrath where you exchange My glory for your glory in the charade of idolatry and it will always end up in sexual promiscuity – an unfettered appetite for sexual promiscuity. God gives them over to that and that’s where it will end up. So God’s exhibition of His wrath is if you do not want His will then now you get your will and this is where your will, will lead you to.

There is yet coming an infliction of God’s judgment that is unmixed but here is a present judgment and that is a judgment of sexual promiscuity that exists among the culture that denies the glory of God for the charades of idolatry. So where do you end up in this stanza? Here is a summation for you. The idolatries of humanism (not humanitarianism), a man centered view of life (example of Peter Matthew 16:13-23 – setting your mind on man’s interests) will always lead to the charades of idolatry. So here is the idolatry of humanism with a darkened mind and it leads to the emptiness of sexual promiscuity, the darkened life.

Note this. Does God bring judgment on sexual promiscuity? Absolutely. God holds the marriage bed in honor and fornicators and adulterers He will judge but what I want you to see in this text is the cultural penetration of sexual promiscuity is His judgment. Now we go to the second stanza. As Paul goes to the second stanza we go to the next part of the exchange and refrain.

Romans 1:24-25 says [24] *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] 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.* Just the thought of denying the majesty and glory of God sends Paul into a doxology but he also gives us the exchange which

goes deeper that we exchange the truth of God for the lie that we are god. So what does God do?

Romans 1:26-27 says [26] *For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; [27] 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.*

So he says when you exchange the truth of God for the lie that you are god then God gives you over and now you descend from sexual promiscuity to unfettered passions of sexual anarchy, even to the point that men are unmanned and women are unwomaned and we express our rebellion in the denial of God's divine will for our lives and sexuality. We express it with sexual anarchy specifically with sexual perversion and its passion for it. It's not how deal with the act because it's not a passion but it is how we deal with the passion because we are sinners. The passion comes from our rebellion and again does God bring judgment on sexual perversion? Just go look at Sodom and Gomorrah. The point here is that the sexual perversion and its desire is the judgment.

Now we have gone from a secular humanism with its charade of idolatry and its emptiness of sexual promiscuity to atheistic humanism and the pervasion of sexual anarchy throughout the society. It doesn't stop there for there is another verse to this song of death and despair.

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So now the exchange is marital heterosexuality for unfettered sexual eroticism. So what does God do? He gives them over so let's look at the next verse. Romans 1:28-32 says [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. [29] They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, [30] slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents (the breakdown of the family), [31] foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. [32] Though they **know God's righteous decree** that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.*

So God gives them over to a darkened mind, to a debased mind and now a socially approved culture of depravity. Everyone approves of this unfettered sexual eroticism that it may run throughout its course. Now we go from this humanism and its idolatry to an atheistic humanism to now the self-absorption and social approval of the sexual promiscuity where the sexual promiscuity, perversion and anarchy are now declared good, acceptable and approved.

I'd like to give you some observations here and then a takeaway. The first observation is what is our present location as a nation? As you go through God's assessment of what happens to a culture that either does not have the Gospel of grace or rejects the Gospel of grace and therefore is devoid of its redeeming grace, transforming grace and the blessings of common grace that flow from it, what stanza are we singing

now as a nation? I am not a prophet or the son of a prophet and you may disagree with me but I believe sang stanza one from 1920 to 1980. I think we have sung stanza two from 1980 to 2010 and I think we are now singing stanza three. We have moved from the approval of sexual promiscuity and its practice with a wink and a nod into the arena of sexual perversion and now sexual anarchy is the socially driven affirmation of the day. We are singing loudly stanza three.

In the last study I shared with you what America's growing religion is and it is secular narcissistic humanism. It's not its only religion but its growing religion. It is being fed by the impotent evangelical church and by the bankrupt theologically liberal church. So that is the growing dynamic in our society. Its church and its messiah is the State. When you look to the State as a messiah there is going to be a mess that comes with it and the Bible tells us what it is. We happen to live in a country affected by the Gospel from the Reformation and the Great Awakening where in this country a first liberty was established. That first liberty was freedom of speech and freedom of religion. That is now being redefined as you make your progress through life. Freedom of speech is being redefined as a politically correct speech. Freedom of religion is now being redefined as freedom of worship.

In other words Christian, they want you to tame your God and put Him in that building at that hour on Sunday and that's what we'll allow you to do but that is all we'll allow you to do. So it is a redefining of our first liberty and before long it will be replaced by a new first liberty of the secular narcissistic religion and that will be unfettered sexual eroticism, socially affirmed, legally codified and culturally supported. So what was once an argument 'won't you tolerate these sexual peccadilloes' has moved from toleration now requiring affirmation and its moved from affirmation requiring propagation and the demand now, will be and is, celebration of unfettered sexual eroticism. It is not just simply tolerate, accept or approve but to allow the propagation to the point that it has to be celebrated.

What is God's response to this? I promise you He is not intimidated. The very movement is judgment upon us. What we are doing is His judgment. We declare our freedom from God, His Word and deny His glory and that sends us into a death spiral that shows up not only with death but destruction. We say we have freedom from God but in reality we put ourselves under the wrath of God. All you have to do is look around. Biology, creation, God's Word and the effect tells you it's wrong. Look at the broken bodies, broken marriages, broken homes, the broken children and the broken hearts. God is not intimidated by it but we're inflicting it by our rebellion against Him. In this temporal judgment of His wrath He is shouting out to us that there is wrath to come that you must flee and there is a salvation now that is true, right and glorious.

The second observation is, are sexual sins the same as others? My answer would be a resounding 'yes' and 'no.' Yes, all sin is worthy of the judgment of God. God's Word says the wages of sin is death. All sin is cosmic treason against God and His glory and when you fall short of that it's death and that's clear in God's Word. That is true in God's Word but there is something about the expression of sexual sins. I will develop this a little more in the next few studies but right now I want to give you a little preview.

As we deal with the issues of marriage and sexuality in contending and defending for the faith in our present day you need to understand that sex is a good, created gift from God to be practiced within the context of a covenant of marriage between one man,

one woman for one life and it's that simple. Anything that abandons that will bring death. You may get some drugs to forestall the death physically but it will bring death all over the place. At the end of a marriage ceremony I say "Upon the consummation of this union I declare you man and wife" in other words the marriage bed initiates the marriage. We just set up the covenant in that ceremony. So it's a marriage bed that is holy and undefiled.

Now the marriage has been consummated and it also brings procreation and recreation to the marriage. It is a covenant renewal. It is the sacrament of marriage. I did not say marriage is a sacrament. The sexual gift is the sacrament of marriage. It is the physical act that declares the unity of one and it mirrors our relationship with Christ who is our Groom and we are His bride. Intimately He is in us and we are in Him for nothing can separate us from Him. That is why the sexual relationship is so sacred in the context of the covenant of marriage that declares the majesty of God's redeeming work in His people. That's why when we make a covenant of rebellion we will take gift and it becomes a very real expression of our rebellion against God. We deny You. You are distinctive from us. We deny every distinction You put within us – gender, sexual and all distinction we deny and that's the way we tell You.

Are all sins worthy of the judgment of God? Yes but sexual sins are running throughout this text because they are the peculiar way that one we express our rebellion. Our president has recently said he is going to be on the side of socially approving sexual anarchy and he did it under this rubric "I have had a moral evolution." My wife sat me back in the chair because what I wanted to say was that 'you did not have a moral evolution but you had a moral devolution and the reason for that is because you are in a culture that is in a revolution against God' and that's the way it is expressed and that's what then God inflicts back upon us as our own judgment from His wrath. Then that sends us into this death spiral before God.

The third observation is what is the honest assessment and to give you that I have to make a confession. Do you know why we are in this shape in our culture? We are in a Gospel of grace rejecting culture and we are there because of us. How does grace get into the culture? It gets in through His people – either with infiltration and we've lost the message or with intimidation and we've become silent. So my dear friends I call you to contend and defend the faith! That's why we do these every member commitment canvases for we need to be on message on mission and in ministry. Let's make the commitment of ourselves – all that we are and all that we have. Surely financial resources are part of it but the Gospel is the only hope for this nation and the instrument to bring the Gospel to this nation is His church. It is a Christ-centered, Gospel saturated, Bible-shaped, Holy Spirit empowered, prayer engaged, God glorifying church that is the only thing that can speak to this culture.

Let me take this a step further based on the elections we just had. I have people say "Oh what a wonderful election we just had" where the Republicans took control of the Senate. With all due respect, it may end up a wonderful election where your candidates were elected and everything and maybe this is revival. I will promise you that revival can come and I long for it to come but I don't think this election was a revival. I think this election is still a culture absorbed in self-interest and the people in power didn't deliver it so we're going to give someone else a chance. It wasn't to move toward the sacred dynamics of God's grace and glory in the culture. Now maybe it can lead to that

with the right people in place and Godly statesmen but it won't get there until God's transforming, redeeming and common grace infiltrates the culture and that comes from us. That's why we're here so that the Gospel of saving grace in Jesus Christ is declared in word and in deed. You ought to see where Rome was when Paul went in. Its continuation, I'm convinced, was the impact of the Gospel that turned the world upside down and that was a Roman world that turned the world upside down. So where do we go from here?

Here is the takeaway. It is a simple takeaway. We have been singing the song of the funeral march of a culture deprived because it is rejecting the Gospel of grace from Christ or it's not being delivered by those who are supposed to deliver it in word and deed. So my takeaway is that there is another song to be sung. This song is in Romans 8. It is a triumphant one, a song of life.

Romans 8:28-39 says [28] *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. [29] For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. [30] And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

[31] *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? [32] He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? [33] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. [35] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [36] As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."*

[37] *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [38] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

It is not about us. It is about Him and we are here for Him who gave us that life. There is the song that our culture needs to hear sung. It is the triumphant hallelujah song of life. Notice that song also has an exchange and a 'God gave over.' In this song of life your sins are exchanged for His righteousness and God gave His Son over for you that you and I could have everlasting life.

You may be reading this today and this culture of death you know is not just outside of you but is inside of you as well. There is a Savior who has done another exchange and He takes your sin and gives you your righteousness. There is a Gospel song that we are singing for you today. It is not the song of the righteousness of God bringing judgment with His power but it's the song of the righteousness of God being given to you by His power that took your sin and exchanged it. You can not only be forgiven of it but you can be changed by that grace. Such were some of you Paul says to the Corinthians and so it can be true for you.

You might be thinking but what about our culture? I have tried to be honest with the picture but I am not in despair and it's because this country is the beneficiary of two

great Gospel awakenings. I wish you could have seen what this country looked like when they broke out. We had a Gospel awakening from 1735 to 1765 with Edwards, Whitfield, Samuel Davies and others. The church came alive and it actually gave birth to this country. After Unitarian Universalism came back in and infiltrated then we had another Gospel awakening from 1785 or 1790 all the way up to about 1880, over many years and in various ways began to unfold. So we have seen all that God has given to us and in each case it came at darkest hours. We are currently in a dark hour and it is in hours like this that the Gospel of grace shines forth.

Dare I do the Lord of the Rings here? Do you want to see spiders run then put the light in front of them. Do you want to see necromancers flee then put the light in front of them. Do you want to see armies flee then put the light in front of them. The light of the Gospel in word and deed is what this society needs that comes to us, through us and moves throughout society. This culture of depravity is seeking to denounce its guilt and its shame by drawing others into it with social approval and celebration. As it shamelessly does that with this cultural conformity, we must meet it and how do we do that? That shameless movement of the culture must be met with the shameless movement of God's people. I am not ashamed of the Gospel and that's why Paul put it there. I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel met Rome, Athens and the Gospel needs to meet this culture but first it must take hold of us so that with Paul we say to a shameless culture, 'we shamelessly tell you I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for it's the power righteousness of God and you can be right with God.' Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. I thank You that You are clear to us even though we will attempt to cloud it with darkened minds, You are clear to us in creation and in Your Word, now Holy Spirit give us eyes to see and ears to hear. Holy Spirit I know there must be someone reading this that looks at this death spiral of sexual anarchy and don't know where they are. They may know only where they are. They may know they are there where the cultural decadence has taken over them because they have not yet seen the glory of God in Christ. Would You let them see it today? There is a Savior whom You gave over for them and it was Your Son, who took their sin and exchanged it for His righteousness and by the power of God will bring them from death unto life. Dear friend, you don't have to go get better for this is a gift. By faith receive Jesus. If you made that decision please call us here at Briarwood at 205-776-5200 and we'll help you get started in that new life in Him. I want you to know Life. Father, I simply ask as we sing 'Beautiful Savior' to all the nations, through Your people that this Savior will be exalted in all of His beauty to this nation. We know that You have done it at least two times. God, in Your patience, simply don't be patient in Your wrath but may Your patience lead us to repentance and may the Gospel of saving grace and its benefits of common grace reign again so that there would be a new state of this union for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.