

“Suppressing the Truth by Unrighteousness”

(Romans 1:16-32)

Introduction

➤ Many years ago, I started using “Fourth of July Sunday” as an opportunity to preach what I have called a “state of the church address.” My heartfelt and prayerful desire is to bring the truth of God’s Word to bear on a prevalent issue or threat facing the church. In past years, I have preached on topics such as humanism, Mormonism, evolution, the “seeker movement,” abortion, racism, universalism, the “emerging/emergent” church, submission to government (last year), and more.

These are not political rants or soapbox sermons. Rather, this is an opportunity for us to look into God’s Word to find instruction and direction as to how we are to live in the culture and time in which we live.

➤ This year, in light of our nation’s continued (and seemingly accelerated) spiral into immorality and idolatry, I have decided to preach on Romans 1:16-32. The book of Romans was written by the apostle Paul (Rom.1:1) – while he was in the city of Corinth, during his third missionary journey, around 56-57 A.D. – *“To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saint”* (Rom.1:7). In other words, Paul wrote this letter to the Christians who were living in Rome in the first century.

In many ways, ancient Rome was very similar to contemporary America. The city of Rome, the epicenter of the Roman empire, was awash in idolatry and polytheism, sexual immorality, political turmoil, superstition, opposition to Christianity and the persecution of Christians (sound familiar?). Being a Christian in 1st century Rome was not too unlike being a Christian in 21st century America.

✓ Illust: There is a story of a man who was walking in the forest one day, and noticed that on every tree down one side of the pathway was a painted target with an arrow dead-center of the target. He then came upon a little boy, with a bow in his hand. He asked the boy, “Are you the one who shot all these arrows?” The boy answered, “Yes.” “Wow”, exclaimed the man, “how did you get so good as to hit the bullseye every time?” The boy said, “It’s simple. First, I shoot the arrow, then I paint the target around it.”

➤ This is illustrative of the subjective truth and relative morality that are so prevalent in America today. For as our culture/society rejects the truth of God, and the truth of God’s Word, it falls into greater foolishness and greater godlessness. In the end, without a belief in and faithfulness to the Word of God truth is relative and “everyone does what is right in their own eyes” (see Jdg.17:6). Effectively, spiritually and morally speaking, painting targets around wherever the arrows land.

The result is moral chaos, confusion, and conflict; which results in despair, volatility, and violence. Worse still, there comes a point in God “gives up” on rebellious sinners, abandoning them to their own sinful choices/actions and the consequences/judgment of their sin (e.g., disease, addiction, loneliness, despair, death, condemnation). Sin – a rejection of God and God’s Word – is the true pandemic in America (and the world) today!

While this is certainly prevalent in our contemporary society, it is certainly nothing new. Throughout the history of the world there have been many times in which God has turned people over to their sin, removing His gracious and merciful restraints, allowing them to experience their rejection of Him as their God.

Prov 1:24-31 ~ “Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded,²⁵because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof,²⁶I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you,²⁷when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you.²⁸Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me.²⁹Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord,³⁰would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof,³¹therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices.”

Acts 14:16 ~ “In past generations [God] allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.”

Ps 2:1-4 ~ “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ²The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, ³‘Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.’ ⁴He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.”

➤ It can be soundly argued that God has, for some time now, given America over to the consequences of sin. This is not to say that everyone living in America is lost, or that there is no hope. But it is to say that there can come a time – for an individual, a culture, or nation – where God abandons sinners to live the godless life they so greatly desire.

While God is perfectly patient and merciful, there is a limit to God’s patience and mercy. There is a time in which God’s patience gives way to judgment, and His mercy gives way to wrath. There comes a time when the unrepentant sinner will experience God’s eternal and just condemnation, and this does not always begin when the sinner dies.

➤ The most graphic and comprehensive teaching regarding God’s abandoning the sinner is found in the book of Romans.

Rom 1:18-32 ~ “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For 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. ²¹For 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. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

²⁴Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷and 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.

²⁸And 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. ²⁹They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²Though 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.”

➤ This passage reveals what happens when God gives the rebellious (unrepentant) sinner, or the sinful nation, over to the consequences of sin. Romans 1:18-32 details the wrath that God unleashes on those who stubbornly reject Him as God, and on those who foolishly rebel against His commands. From these verses we can readily discover 1) the revelation of God’s wrath, 2) the reasons for God’s wrath, and 3) the results of God’s wrath.

A. The revelation of God's wrath (vs.18).

➤ At the outset, in verse eighteen, we read: “*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth*” (vs.18). To be sure, the word “*wrath*” (*orge*) can mean anger, fury, indignation or even vengeance. But God’s wrath is not capricious or reckless, nor is it ever unjust or sinful. Rather, the wrath of God is His just response to sin and just judgement against sinners.

We make a serious mistake when we try to explain God’s wrath through the lens of human anger. The wrath of God is not like the wrath of humans. As humans, we often get angry for wrong reasons and express our anger in sinful ways. God’s wrath is never misguided or misplaced. It is always righteous, always holy, always right.

➤ God’s wrath is not contrary to His love or His grace. Rather it is the outworking of His divine love and righteousness against sin. God is by nature love (1Jn.4:8, 16), but His love is perfect and perfecting not permissive and pampering. As we must not try to explain God’s wrath through the lens of human anger, we also must not to explain God’s love through the lens of human love. God’s love is pure, holy, and just, not permissive, fickle and conditional.

➤ In Romans 1:18, we find three distinct characteristics of the wrath of God as described in this passage.

1. Its timing (vs.18)

➤ It is important for us to understand that the word “*is revealed*” (*apokalypto*; vs.18), which could also be translated “uncovered” or “made apparent”, indicates a current and ongoing display of God’s wrath [“revealed” – present, passive, indicative verb]. In other words, here we see not that God’s wrath was revealed or will be revealed, but is being (constantly, presently) revealed.

This, therefore, is not referring to God’s final (future, eternal) judgment, which will occur at the end of time, but a wrath that is already being executed.

Rom 2:5 ~ “But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.”

2. Its source (vs.18)

➤ We also note the source from which God’s wrath is revealed: “*from heaven*” (*apo ouranos*; vs.18). “Heaven” is the place – i.e. the throne of God – from where God rules with sovereign knowledge and authority. Earth is absolutely subject to desires and decisions of God who is in heaven. God righteous judgments are executed from throne in heaven.

Isa 66:1 ~ “Thus says the Lord: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool ...’”

Ps 103:19 ~ “The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.”

➤ In other words, God’s wrath is divine – unleashed by His sovereign wisdom, will, power, and authority. No one, no thing, can hinder or halt that which God has purposed and executed. This is graphically illustrated in the Biblical description of Christ’s Return (His Second Coming):

Rev 19:11-16 ~ “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹²His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.”

3. Its target (vs.18)

- Thirdly, we see those on whom God's wrath is being executed: "*against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth*" (vs.18). Paul specifically described the people to whom God's wrath is revealed with two nouns: "*ungodliness*" (*asebeia*) and "*unrighteousness*" (*adikia*) – literally without God and without righteousness.
- Those who reject Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior, remain in their sin and under the wrath of God. They are "ungodly" and "unrighteous." This is really two sides of the same coin. That is, they are ungodly because they are unrighteous, or unrighteous because they are ungodly. True godliness and righteousness come only by God's saving grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Furthermore, Paul explained, "... *by their unrighteousness suppress the truth*" (vs.18). That is, in their rejection of God – and the Good News of Jesus Christ – sinners live out their unrighteousness in an attempt to silence the truth of God (which they actually know to be true; cf. vs.19-20). The Greek word translated "*suppress*" (*katecho*) can literally mean to hold to, or to hold down. The imagery here is that of the truth of God as a large spring that is about to be sprung (or has been sprung), and sinners attempting to hold down that truth by their sinful and rebellious actions. Such sinners are neither innocent, nor ignorant of God's truth (see vs.20). In their heart of hearts – that is, the conscience – they know the truth about God.

Later, in verse 25, Paul would further describe these sinners as those who have "*exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator*" (vs.25).

B. The reasons for God's wrath (vs.19-23)

- Thus, God's wrath is (always) right and always justified. Again, God's wrath is never capricious and never without (divine, godly) reason.
- Rom 1:19-23** ~ "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.
²⁰For 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.
²¹For 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. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools,²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.
- From these verses, we can identify three main reasons for the current revelation of God's wrath against sinners.

1. Mankind's willful ignorance (vs.19-20)

- Despite what you may have heard, or believe, no one dies without knowledge of the one true God. God has revealed Himself to all me – He has made it plain for them to comprehend His existence and His wrath. And everyone is responsible for their response to God's gracious self-revelation. God's Word tells us: "*For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For 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*" (vs.19-20).

At the very least, every human can know God through the "general revelation" of God's creation. The invisible God has clearly, unmistakably, revealed Himself as Creator through the visible creation. Creation itself demands a Creator (which is one reason why atheists, under the religious guise of Darwinism, refer to creation as evolution). Creation itself declares the existence of the Creator God.

Ps 19:1-6 ~ “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. ²Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. ³There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. ⁴Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, ⁵which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. ⁶Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.”

➤ God has clearly revealed Himself – “*his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature*” (vs.20) – to everyone through the created world (as well as the human conscience, and the inspired Word). The invisible God revealed Himself through the visible medium of creation – “*in the things that have been made*” (vs.20; Acts 14:15-17; 17:23-28) – its beauty, complexity, design, and sustainability.

This is not to say that we know everything about God, but that we know enough about God to understand and be accountable to Him. The “general revelation” of God comes through His creation, and the “special revelation” of God comes through His Word (i.e., the holy Scriptures). We see God as sovereign Creator in His creation, and we see God as Judge and Redeemer in His Word.

➤ Therefore, there are no valid or defensible excuses for not believing in God. “*For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ... So they are without excuse*” (vs.19-20 [“without excuse”; *anapologētos*]). That is, no one can honestly say that God failed to reveal Himself, or that He has left insufficient evidence of His existence and character. Those who reject God do not truly do so out of ignorance, but out of a love for their sin (Jn.3:19; Rom.1:) and a hostility toward God (Rom.8:7; Jms.4:4).

2. Mankind’s base ingratitude (vs.21)

➤ Again, the sinner is not ignorant about God but rather rebellious against God: “*For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened*” (vs.21). The sinner’s ingratitude toward God reveals the sinner’s true attitude toward God. Again, it is both ignorant and arrogant to be ungrateful to God.

Since the do not “*honor God as God*”, they do not “*give thanks to him*” for all that He does for them. While this certainly includes what God has done to save them (in sending His one and only Son to die on the cross for their sins), but also includes every good thing that God gives in His “common grace” to all men (e.g., life, love, rain, sun, happiness, patience, etc.; see Matt.5:45; Acts 14:15-17). Ingratitude toward God is a sin, and it is a fundamental sin of the unrepentant sinner.

➤ To be sure, those who fail to praise God or give thanks to Him have become “*futile in their thinking*” (vs.21; *mataioō* ... *dialogismos*, “vain...reasoning”). They trade the infinite value of knowing God, for the temporal and worthless things of this world. They seek to rob God of the glory due His name. “[T]hey take the diamond of God’s glory, enter the pawn shop of pride, and hock it for the broken marble of self-reliance” (John Piper; sermon: “Proud People Don’t Say Thanks; Nov.20, 1983).

Consequently, “*their foolish hearts were darkened*” (vs.21). Meaning, those who reject the light of God’s truth will remain in spiritual darkness (or degrade into greater darkness) – enslaved to the power of the evil one (Eph.2:2; 6:12; 1Jn.5:19).

2 Cor 4:4 ~ “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

3. Mankind’s defiant idolatry (vs.22-23)

➤ Scripture reveals to us that there is no such thing as religious neutrality or apathy. Everyone is worshiping (at least) something or someone. In rejecting God as God, unbelievers/sinners do not merely worship nothing. Those who do not truly worship the one true God direct their worship to other

things – they reject the Creator God and worship creation as God! (Rom.1:25). “*Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles*” (vs.22-23).

Unbelievers (idolators) will often ridicule Christian doctrine in an attempt to make themselves seem wise (see Ps.14:1; 1Cor.1:18-31). Idols do not have to be figurines or statues. An idol is something you worship instead of, or in addition to, the one true God. It is anything that is more important to you than God. An idol is something that promises to give you security or identity apart from God, or something that if you were to lose it would rob life of its ultimate meaning and value.

Today, in America, some of the more prominent (“sophisticated”) idols are political ideologies, secular psychology, worldly philosophies, humanistic worldviews, materialism/money, sexual immorality, sports, social media, technology, relationships, self-esteem, celebrities, false religion, etc.

➤ God is justified in His wrath against unrepentant sinners, because they not only know Him but have rejected Him – suppressing the truth about (vs.18) – and pursued false gods. To reject the Creator and instead worship creation is the height of ignorance and arrogance. “*Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles*” (vs.22-23). Rather than seeking to glorifying God, they glorify (and seek to be glorified in) the things of this world.

C. The results of God’s wrath (vs.24-32)

➤ In Romans, God’s active wrath is executed as He hands sinners over to evil. Those who reject God as God, who worship created things rather than the Creator, who refuse to acknowledge or appreciate God’s goodness, will be given over to the consequences of their rebellion and idolatry. He will remove His merciful protective hand, and give them over to that which they desire most. A person’s increasing or unyielding wickedness is proof of God’s judgment. For the unrepentant sinner is unconcerned about their sin, indifferent toward the just wrath of God, even mocking the idea of God and God’s judgment. All this is proof of God immediate and just wrath.

Rom 1:24-32 ~ “Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷and 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.

²⁸And 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. ²⁹They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²Though 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.”

➤ We read three times that God “*gave them up*” (vs.24, 26, 28). This short three-word phrase in English is one-word in Greek (*paradidomi*). It literally means “to give up” or “to give over”, and it carries with it the implication of abandonment or being forsaken. Those who reject God are rejected by God. He will literally give them over to their own sinful desires, and they will eternally (if not repentant) experience the consequences of their sinful choices. They will be deprived of God’s restraining grace.

“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves” (vs.24)

“For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature” (vs.26).

“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” (vs.28).

➤ God gives the sinner over to his/her own sin – spiraling deeper and deeper into sin until they finally feel the weight of their sin and repent, or die and face God’s wrathful eternal judgment. Notice that the spiraling moral decline is in three stages.

1. God gave them up to sexual immorality (vs.24-25)

➤ The first stage of God’s wrath is abandoning sinners to the consequences of their sexual immorality. In verse twenty-four we read: “*Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves*” (vs.24).

➤ Sexual immorality can be rightly defined as any sexual activity outside of the monogamous marital union of one man and one woman. In general, this refers to any illicit sexual activity from premarital sex to adultery. God is not anti-sex. In fact, He created it – with all physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual passions and pleasures. Sex is God’s idea; His creation; His gift to mankind. God is not anti-sex, but He is anti-sin.

➤ In today’s American culture, abstinence before marriage has been relegated to religious prudery, and monogamy within marriage has been redefined as sexual repression. In fact, abstinence is rejected as a feasible curriculum for sex education. Many schools actually refuse to teach abstinence while at the same time actively teaching “safe sex” (which does not exist outside of marriage) and passing out contraceptives to students. But the Bible is unmistakably clear that all sexual immorality is sin in the eyes of God.

➤ Statistically, a large percentage of professing Christians view “living together” as morally neutral but view adultery as morally wrong. Scripture makes no such distinction – both are sinful and immoral in the eyes of God. Whereas cohabitation may be more socially acceptable in our society, it is no more acceptable to God. Any sexual activity or relationship outside of the monogamous marital union of one man and one woman is an abomination to the Lord. Sexual purity is not prudery, it is prizing and presenting your body as holy and pleasing unto the Lord.

1 Cor 6:18-20 ~ “Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. ¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

Eph 5:3 ~ “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.”

Col 3:5 ~ “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

1 Thess 4:3-5 ~ “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God”

➤ Sexual immorality is a form of idolatry. It is no coincidence that those who reject God often engage in many different forms of sexual immorality. In verse twenty-five we read the reason: “*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*” (vs.25).

2. God gave them up to homosexuality (vs.26-27)

➤ The second stage of God's wrath of abandonment is giving sinner over to the sin of homosexuality:

"*For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions*" (vs.26). These verses condemn homosexuality as a behavior of "*dishonorable passions*" (vs.26; *atimia pathos*) and "*shameful acts*" (vs.27; *aschēmosynē*). Homosexuality is perverted sexual act that is not only "*contrary to nature*" (i.e., unnatural), but also contrary to God's design and will concerning human sexual relations (Gen.1:22; Lev.18:22).

This is clearly in reference to homosexual sin: "*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*" (vs.26-27).

1 Cor 6:9-11 ~ "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

➤ Two predominant themes emerge from God's Word with regard to the issue of homosexuality. First, it is clear that homosexuality is not the greatest or unforgivable sin. Notice that homosexuals are not alone in the list of people who "will not inherit the kingdom of God" (1Cor.6:9,10). This passage does not isolate homosexuality alone as a "wicked" sin. This same condemnation is also true of "*the sexually immoral ... idolaters ... adulterers ... thieves ... greedy ... drunkards ... slanders ... swindlers*" (vs.9-10). It is wrong for Christians (or anyone else for that matter) to treat or view homosexuality as the worst of all sins. For clearly it is not. Unfortunately, all too many Christians consider sexual immorality (i.e. premarital heterosexual sex) as a minor or less-significant sin, but think of homosexuality as a major or very-severe sin. Again, the Bible makes no such distinction and such discrimination is a false representation of God's Word and distortion of true Christianity.

Second, however, it is clear that homosexuality is viewed as a "wicked" (unsaved) lifestyle before God. Just as we cannot elevate homosexuality to be the worst of all sins, we dare not redefine homosexuality as not a sin. For the sin of homosexuality is no worse than sexual immorality, adultery, idolatry, but it is also no less a sin than sexual immorality, adultery, idolatry. According to God's Word all such sins, if not repented of, are evidence of an unsaved life – a life that "will not inherit the kingdom of God." Just as we dare not justify the sin of adultery or idolatry we cannot justify the sin of homosexuality. Justification of (or redefining) sin is like re-labeling a bottle of poison as candy – it is not only misleading, but can result in catastrophic consequences. Redefining homosexuality as anything but sin is a misrepresentation of God's Word, and can mislead someone into the severe consequences of eternal condemnation.

➤ Again we see that, but for the saving grace of God in Christ, sinners will reap the just consequences for their sin: "*receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error*" (vs.27; see Gal.6:7-8).

3. God gave them up to moral depravity (vs.28-32)

➤ The third stage of God's abandoning wrath can be labeled moral depravity. The word "*debased*" (*adokimos*; vs.28) literally means impure or worthless – the term was commonly used of metals that were rejected and discarded by refiners because of impurities. "The mind that finds God worthless becomes worthless itself. It is debauched, deceived, and deserving only of God's divine wrath" (John MacArthur; The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Romans; 1:28-32).

This spirals into all kinds of sins: "*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,*³⁰ *slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,*

³¹*foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless*" (vs.29-31). These are not the sins that all sinners commit, but all the sins (and more) that sinners commit in their depravity.

➤ As a nation we seem bent on not only tolerating any form of illicit sexual expression and perversion, but actually going so far as to flaunt and encourage such behavior – as well as to attack and condemn all those who disagree. This country appears to be irrecoverably on the slippery slide to further sexual immorality and depravity. This is becoming increasingly evident as we see our country's condoning and promoting of sexual immorality, homosexuality, and other sins as "normal", "healthy" and "acceptable" behaviors.

Today, in American society, we actually celebrate and reward those who excel in ungodliness and unrighteousness. We quite literally give out prizes and awards to those who do the worst things best. This is the essence of what the apostle Paul wrote in verse thirty-two "*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*" (vs.32).

➤ When sinners reject God – consciously refusing to repent and receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior – God pronounces His judicial abandonment of them, leaving them to the consequences they have chosen.

Conclusion

➤ This, in essence, is the "bad news" – God's (present, active) judgment against sin and sinners.

Col 3:5-6 ~ "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶On account of these the wrath of God is coming."

Rom 2:5 ~ "But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed." (see Rom.3:23)

➤ But, thanks to God through His Son Jesus Christ, there is "Good News":

Rom 1:16-17 ~ "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"

Rom 5:8-9 ~ "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God."

➤ The truth of the "gospel" (*euangelion*; "good news") is that Jesus is the Christ (i.e. the Messiah), the one and only Son of God and the one and only Savior from God. To believe the Gospel is to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, recognizing that you are a sinner, justly condemned by God, and in desperate need of God's forgiveness that comes only through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Jesus is the only one who "delivers us from the wrath to come" (1Thes.1:10).

John 3:36 ~ "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."

Eph 2:5-10 ~ "even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved ... ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (see Rom.5:1; Gal.2:16)

Titus 3:5-8 ~ "he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."