

VII. Romans in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel of God
“Three Divine Judgments and the Death Spiral
in a Cultural Celebration of Idolatry—Part I”
Romans 1:18–32
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God’s Word is inspired, infallible, inerrant, and we’ll start by looking in Romans 1. Romans 1:15–32 says [15] *So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.*

[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.”*

[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, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

[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.*

[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.*

[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, [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.*

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

If it didn’t feel like a lifetime ago or like yesterday or tomorrow, I couldn’t wait to do it again. Over 50 years ago we Cindy and I were at a jewelry store in North Carolina and to my astonishment and my everlasting blessing she said ‘yes’ to marrying me. It was probably the worst decision she ever made in her life but one of the greatest I have benefited from in my life. I thank God for it. I wanted to seal this deal as quickly as I could so we went down to get the ring which I had already worked on with a friend of mine and had him set it aside so that when she came in he would open the box in front of her. As he did this, because I had already seen it I

wasn't looking at it all that closely but I was looking at her closely to see what she was going to do. I was hoping to see some sign of approval as he revealed and made manifest to her the ring and thankfully I saw the eyes sparkle somewhat, her lips turned up in a smile and then came something else. My friend set the box down on the counter, then brought out this black velvet cloth which he shook in front of us as he laid it on the glass counter, almost as though he was going to do a magic trick. He picked up the ring and what was already beautiful and manifested he laid on this black cloth and this ring just seemed to jump out and was even more beautiful, even in ways that I was amazed, believing the best about that ring that I possibly could.

That is what Paul is doing now in this text. We already know who wrote this epistle, when Paul wrote, where he wrote it, why he wrote it and what he is going to write about. It's called the Gospel of God and he has already said it five times in Romans 1:1–15. This Gospel originates from God, is secured by God, applied by God and is to praise and glory of God. In the last study we looked at what Paul had to say about this Gospel in its five-fold profile where he took this glorious, wonderful truth of the Gospel and he displayed it. The language he uses for this Gospel is eager to preach, not ashamed of it, revealing the power of God through the righteousness of God through faith and by His grace.

Now he is about to take this glorious jewel of the Gospel of grace revealed in His Word, against the backdrop of the bad news. The Good News explodes in implication and majesty when you see the backdrop of the bad news. Now we are looking at the wrath of God revealed. The Gospel is the grace of God revealed in power using His righteousness. As we look at the backdrop of this bad news I want to give you this overview.

Paul will unfold this Gospel of God in Romans 1 through 3 which is where we are right now beginning at verse 18 which will show us our desperate need for the Gospel of God even though we don't deserve it or want it. He will take these first three chapters to get us to the point of 'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23). Then Paul will display the provisions of this Gospel in Romans 4 and 5. He will reveal the application of this Gospel in Romans 6, 7 and 8. He will show us the implications of this Gospel in Romans 9, 10 and 11. Then he will show us the glorious life of this Gospel in Romans 12 through 16.

In this study the text we will cover I feel not only incompetent, overwhelmed but burdened because of the exquisite care that the Spirit of God allowed Paul to bring to this issue of the wrath of God revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness. Before Paul gets to Romans 2 to show us how the Gentiles are lost and Romans 3 of how the Jews are lost, in Romans 1 he gives us the lostness of sin, its depravity, its debasing, its disillusionment, its deceitfulness and lays it out in what I call the song of death which is our text for this study.

Why would I call it the song of death? I believe it has three stanzas and there are two sets of three in Romans 1:18–32. Paul uses the word 'exchanges' three times – our exchange of God's glory for sin. Then he uses what I believe one of the most horrific words in the Bible in this text. My favorite word in the Bible is the word 'but.' I think the most horrific words in the Bible are 'depart from Me you workers of lawlessness' for this is final judgment of God that casts impenitent sinners into the very eternal torments of hell which is irrevocable but the next horrific words to me are 'God gave them over' where God says 'alright, My judgment and wrath, your will be done.' God gives them over to their rebellion against Him with all of its consequences and that wrath is revealed.

Why is this death spiral of a song here? It is there inevitably whenever the church gets off mission off message and off ministry in that culture or where the church has not shown up in that culture because this is the inevitable trajectory of men and women in sin against the Lord.

The only thing that can stop our trajectory of depravity and debased minds is the grace of God. God's grace comes through two streams. One is through redeeming grace whereby sinners and transformed and changed by God's grace and that impacts a culture. Secondly, God's grace comes through common grace and that doesn't transform sinners but it does retard and restrain sin in society so that we're not as sinful as we would be and could be – the salt and light of the witness of the Gospel. The Light sends the Gospel to transform sinners through redeeming grace and salt will restrain sinners in common grace from being as evil as they could be and would be. When the church begins to be about itself instead of Christ's mission, message and ministry and the grace of God is not flowing into the culture through the church on mission, on message and in ministry, then sin whose only conqueror and victor is Grace abounds in the culture. This is the three-stanza song of abounding sin from sexual promiscuity to sexual perversion to social approval of what ought to be shame now becomes shameless and exalted as the new, dare I say, reset. That is the culture that now celebrates what it once condemned.

I want to show you where Paul shows such rigorous logic and theology. Where and how do men, women and the cultures they create go into this culture of a death spiral? What is the soil it comes from? What is it that causes the wrath of God to be revealed on this side of eternity? We know the wrath of God at the Judgment Seat and on the other side of eternity but that is not what this text is talking about. This text is talking about the wrath of God that is revealed time, not will be revealed. The wrath of God for eternity is unmixed, unadulterated, everlasting and irrevocable but there is a wrath of God revealed now that gives us the backdrop that you start putting amazing in front of grace as you understand it. We were self-inflicted, helpless and hopeless. We embrace hopelessness as if it's hope. We called our impotence strength. We called our foolishness wisdom. That's the soil in which the depravity of a culture and lives begin to grow. Paul repeats a word ten times with rigor to show us connecting points that he doesn't want us to miss.

There are two revelations – one of God's grace in the Gospel and one of God's wrath. Paul uses the word 'for' eleven times in this Romans 1:16–32 text. Paul is eager to preach this Gospel for he is not ashamed of the Gospel and it is the power of God for it is salvation to everyone who believes. Why is the power of God for salvation available? For the righteousness of God and the grace of God through Christ is one that absorbs and removes our sins and provides for us a righteousness that is pure to take us to heaven so we are acceptable, for the righteous shall live by faith. Why is the Gospel so glorious and majestic? Why is the grace of God revealed in the Gospel which is the power of God that uses the righteousness of God to save sinners to the glory of God?

The backdrop is the bad news. Romans 1:18 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.* Why is the wrath of God revealed? We know the wrath of God is revealed because we know about the flood in the days of Noah, we know about Sodom and Gomorrah, the best trained army of Pharaoh in the world drowning in the Red Sea and the Kings of the valley. There has been time and time again the wrath of God revealed in the Bible, the temporal wrath of God that is mixed with His mercy which can be transformed, unlike the final wrath of God at the Judgment Seat which is eternal. We know the wrath of God is revealed from heaven on this earth in time, space and matter from history. The wrath of God in this time is communicating a state of ground of His holiness – where by no means will He leave the guilty (ungodliness and unrighteousness of men) unpunished. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

Ungodliness is living life without reference to God because you have determined you are god – I am who I am because of who I say I am and if I worship it will be idolatry because I will make the gods I worship declaring that I am god. This is expressed in our rebellion against God. What is the result? Joined to ungodliness is unrighteousness which is the transgression of the law of God. If I live life in denial of God I do so by transgressing the law of God – unrighteousness. According to Romans 1:18 we get to the core of unrighteousness. God brings His wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

If you are saved today it is not because God made an exception. It is because the wrath due against our ungodliness fell somewhere else. It was on Jesus. This is inflexible. God is holy. The reason we're saved is not because God winked at that or set that aside. What is ground zero of all of our sin? It is that we suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Wrath is an interesting word for we get the word orgy from it. In other words, there is a peroxin of the passion of God against all sin. The wrath of God is evoked on the soil of our ungodliness and unrighteousness and that soil is when we suppress the truth with our unrighteousness to declare ourselves as god. We are not victims. We are victimizers of ourselves.

Suppress is an interesting word. It could be translated, sit upon or incarcerate. We will put the truth in prison and incarcerate it, revealing the imprisonment of our own souls in sin. Another word that is really interesting is the word cancel where we seek to cancel the truth. I hope you realize the cancel culture is not new. It has always been here. What do you think happened 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem? It was the epitome of a canceled culture crucified – who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Paul is exposing to us that we are born sinners. Our problem is not our environment, although we are in a broken environment because of sin that we produce this environment. Our problem is a not lack of information. Our problem is a heart problem. We imprison, suppress, and cancel the truth of God revealed. We do our best to deny its existence. We make sure we declare that it's non-real and therefore it's not to be believed. Our foolishness becomes the truth and God's truth is called foolishness and the reason we have a cancelled culture is because we all have a cancelled heart.

One might be thinking right now, 'Pastor, I didn't cancel the truth because I came to Jesus.' The reason you came to Jesus is because Jesus cancelled your cancelled heart or using His language He gave you eyes to see and ears to hear instead of the blindness of sin that suppresses the truth. I hope right now the Gospel is breaking through to you as amazing and not just a pick-me-up message from God to therapeutically move my life forward. God has done something glorious that in the midst of His wrath revealed, His grace has been revealed whereby that wrath was absorbed by Someone else – Jesus Christ – so that you could be set free from your own cancelled culture and be given a heart that loves the truth.

According to the text everyone is suppressing the truth. Not everyone has the Bible so we're not necessarily talking about the Bible, we're talking about truth from God somewhere else. Where is it? We get this word 'for' again. Let's go back to the text and notice Paul's language. Romans 1:19–20 says [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.

When I was talking about getting my wife a ring, my friend came out and displayed, manifested, revealed that diamond and God has manifested, revealed, displayed the glory of His grace in Christ. Now it is in the backdrop of the display, the revelation and the manifestation of

His wrath against sin. The fact that we are saved is not that that wrath was not displayed but that it was not displayed upon us but it was displayed upon Christ to save us who believe. The truth is there for everyone has it. I'd like to quote R.C Sproul on this one when he was asked 'What happens to the innocent natives?' Sproul said "All the innocent natives go to heaven but we have one problem, there are no innocent natives." If there were the last thing we ought to be doing is a faith promise offering for missions. Why bring them under accountability with the preaching of the Gospel if they are not already accountable to the truth that has already been revealed? When we are born into this world we suppress the truth in unrighteousness because this truth has already been revealed in us – made in the image of God – and before us through the creation.

Psalm 19:1–5 says [1] *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork.* [2] *Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.* [3] *There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.* [4] *Their 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,*[5] *which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.* His voice comes through the stars, through the intricacies of a leaf and through all of creation. God in His glory is displayed in the creation and the invisible God is made visible by His truth revealed in creation so that we are without excuse.

I can't tell you the number of times people have come up to me thinking they are encouraging me by telling me that they are not an atheist but an agnostic. I'm not encouraged. I'm going to pray for them and minister to them but the reason it's not encouraging because agnosticism is just dishonest atheism. Agnosticism is one basically saying they haven't made a decision because they don't have enough information and that's telling God He is liar because God says the information is there. Your problem is not a lack of information, for the problem is you're cancelling what is already there. Professing to be wise you are becoming a fool instead of seeing the glory of God who is Spirit and all of His majesty through what He has made. You have tried to take what He has made and say that you are god and so you begin to move into a self-inflicted sophisticated journey into insanity and imbecility. Psalm 14:1 says [1] *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good.* It makes no sense.

I have tried to be an atheist and I wanted to be one in college. I was contrarian enough as first born finding his own way and my sins were so obvious, I wanted to accommodate them with a doctrine of atheism but I couldn't. I couldn't bring myself to it. I saw the creation and there has to be a Creator. I may not be surrendered to Him as Lord and Savior but I couldn't deny the fact that there was a Creator. I could not bring myself to intellectual suicide or to bring myself to that imbecilic journey of professing to be wise you become fools. I saw order and there had to be an Orderer. I saw the laws God had put in His Creation so there had to be a Law Giver.

Recently I cut part of my thumb off and do you know what had to happen within seconds for me not to bleed to death? 27 things had to happen in the right order within less than a second for me not to die. Then there were 36 things that had to happen in the next three days for me not to die of an infection. Where did those laws come from? One might say they evolved but if those 27 things had to evolve in about a second for me not to die, would you tell me what happened to everybody who didn't have them while they were evolving? That just makes no sense. It's insanity. When I see beauty I know there has to be One who gives that and gives me the ability to perceive beauty which I saw this week with all the things that were blossoming. The animal world doesn't do that but you do that because God made you in His image. That is

why you can appreciate beauty. Now, will you make it about you or will you give glory to God? Will you suppress the truth in unrighteousness and ungodliness or will you worship the God of glory?

We are born with a heart that is devoted to suppressing the truth that God has revealed in creation that is all around us and that is in us. When I'm discipling couples I let them know that baptism doesn't save the child. Secondly, you don't parent to try to get God's gracious promise but you parent from God having given you a gracious promise. Then I tell them bad news and some good news. The bad news is they have to acknowledge that their child is in need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit. We say this because our children are born sinners. They are dead in their sins, helpless and hopeless. The good news is they are born knowing there is a God. You don't meet five-year-old atheists. You have to work at being an atheist and embrace the sophisticated journey to imbecility and insanity.

Go to the church in Northern Alabama where Helen Keller was a member. Go to her house and read about Ms. Sullivan took this who could not see, hear or speak and taught her how to communicate. Why did she bother doing that? You don't bother doing that with a cat. Ms. Sullivan knew that Helen was made in the image of God and God communicates, therefore those made in His image can communicate. For Helen communication came with the feeling in the hand palm and sign language. After Ms. Sullivan got through the first word – water – she then put into her palm the word God. Helen Keller said 'Who?' Then Ms. Sullivan told her about Him and Helen's response to her was 'Oh, I already knew Him I just didn't have a name for Him yet.' When we are born, out of our sinfulness, we suppress the truth with our unrighteousness. We incarcerate it, cancel it and want to remove it in moments like that.

The truth is, nothing doesn't make something and nothing doesn't make something that says to itself 'let's divide.' Nothing also doesn't make something that says to itself, 'Let's divide and reproduce and then order ourselves to complexity.' No, when you leave things alone, they don't order in complexity they disorder into oblivion. That is exactly the imbecility we would accept in order to say 'I'm god and there is no God.' I'm a simple man. I have a watch and I know there is watch maker. When I walk through a field and see a turtle on that post, I know I'm not the first one walking through that field. The evidence calls for the verdict but in our sinfulness we suppress it and cancel it. That is the backdrop of the grace of God revealed. It is the wrath of God revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

I hope you will come back to part two of this study for the number one expression of saying 'no' to truth suppression and truth hunger is worship. That is how you know when people have been redeemed, instead of idolatry there is *latría* – the praise of the most High God.

Here is the takeaway. The heart of the problem is not the lack of information or lack of environment, but is our problem with our sin producing and truth suppressing heart. The heart of the problem is the problem with our heart that produces sin because it suppresses the truth that God has revealed to all of humanity. God's wrath is against all ungodliness and unrighteousness and all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Therefore because of our heart it calls for the wrath of God upon us but here's the Good News. The Gospel reveals God's wrath has been revealed against our ungodliness and unrighteousness at the cross upon Christ who became our sin and endured God's wrath revealing God's grace to save all those who believe.

The greatest expression of the wrath of God revealed is not Sodom and Gomorrah or Pharaoh's army drowning in the Red Sea or at the foot of Mount Sinai. The greatest expression of our cancelled culture in God's grace to save us from the incarceration, suppression and cynical

denial of truth from our heart is Calvary. There where men and women would cancel the Son of God and believe the lie of Satan, there was God cancelling the cancel culture for it was there that Jesus goes to the cross and becomes our sin and God's wrath is revealed against all our ungodliness and unrighteousness upon Christ, who drank the cup of wrath to the bottom and said "It is finished!" There Jesus cancelled God's wrath against us and set us free by the Spirit of God who cancelled our heart suppressing life by giving us a new heart that we would come to Him with eyes to see and ears to hear.

In other words, the Gospel reveals God's wrath has been revealed at the cross upon Christ who became our sin and endured God's wrath so that He reveals God's grace to save us from our sins. Then He sends His Spirit who would cancel our cancelling heart who would remove our suppressing heart so now we have now been set free. John 8:31–32 says [31] *So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, [32] and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* The evidence of the truth setting you free is now you love the truth.

The only way you can escape the wrath of God at the Judgement Seat is by going to Calvary where the wrath of God fell upon Christ and our sins. In that Day do you know what people are going to say at the Judgment? They are going to call upon mountains to fall upon them for they would rather be buried alive with a mountain than to face the wrath of God. Jesus faced it on Mount Calvary so that you and I could be taken to the new heavens and the new earth and Mount Zion, so that we could everlasting life in Him and that truth will set you free. Those who are free hunger for that truth. In fact, Jesus says the mark in the last days of My people will be their love of the truth to the end. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, take us away to truth lovers instead of truth suppressors. Take us to truth emancipation instead of truth cancellation. Take us by Your Spirit to the glories of the grace revealed where the wrath of God has been revealed against our sin at the cross so that we are set free and there is no condemnation but life forevermore. Today if you are reading this and have not come to Christ, Christ brought you to this moment, not simply to see the truth in creation but to hear the witness of saving truth from this transcript. Do not suppress the truth or put it in prison but let that truth free you from the prison of sin, its shame and its condemnation in Christ. You now are forgiven and have a new life in Christ for you have been set free. If you would like to talk or pray with someone please call us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for we long for you to be set free. Where the Spirit of God is, there is liberty. Where the truth is, there is freedom. Where Jesus is, you are free indeed. Father, I thank You for this glorious truth and I thank You because the wrath of God revealed, the grace of God is magnified and so we are eager and unashamed to proclaim it for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

Life Takeaway

The Heart of the Problem is the Problem with our Sin producing and Truth suppressing Heart, which calls for the Wrath of God upon us.

The Gospel reveals God's Wrath has been revealed at the Cross upon Christ, who became our sin and endured God's wrath revealing God's grace to save all who believe.