

IX. Romans in Biblical Perspective  
*The Gospel of God*  
“Three Divine Judgments and the Death Spiral  
in a Cultural Celebration of Idolatry—Part III”  
Romans 1:18–32  
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This is our last study on Romans 1:18–32. This is God’s Word, inspired, infallible, inerrant and sufficient for all matters in life and godliness. Romans 1:18–21 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.*

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

In my study at my house, I have 18 commentaries on the book of Romans on the table. I have used my commentaries on Romans because of the depth of my love for this book and when I get to something I have borrowed from one of these commentators I always try and document as I use it. Because of trying to be timely in this study and to be less interruptive I plan to give my footnotes upfront. Out of those 18 I’m particularly grateful for John Murray, Jim Boyce, Sinclair Ferguson, R.C Sproul and John Stott’s commentaries on Romans and particularly on this challenging text.

If we’re honest at all, when we get to the end of this you’re going to feel like you’re looking into a cultural mirror. The text we’ll be looking at in this study is what I call the three stanza song of death in which a culture has rejected God’s common and redeeming grace or it is absent. This is the inevitable movement of total depravity into absolute depravity. This text is described intricately and it is so tightly woven, but it’s also intense and at least spiritually bone-jarring. This is a description of God’s wrath revealed in this time before eternity.

Whenever I hear and speak of God’s wrath my mind automatically goes to the Judgment Seat where the eternal, irrevocable, unmeasured wrath of God will be poured out against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who now meet His justice having rejected Him. However, this text in Romans is telling us that there is a wrath that is now revealed and Paul is very intricate in the way he has woven this together. It is highly intense in its intentionality. Paul is eager to get to Rome to preach the Gospel but for now the Lord is not allowing him to go. He wants to preach the Gospel of God and it becomes his Gospel because he has embraced it not because he has invented it for the Gospel originates with God – Trinitarian Gospel, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father authors our salvation, the Son accomplishes it and the Holy Spirit applies it.

When we get to Romans 4 we will be marinated in the great Gospel truths – their blessings, implications, commands and call – but from Romans 1:18 to Romans 4 Paul is giving us a taste of why this Gospel of grace is so important. It is not a man invented or modified gospel but a God revealed Gospel in His Word. If you don’t get this right, you will get

everything else wrong in Christianity and this is why it's of first importance. Paul then tells us this Gospel is the power of God and why it gives you joy. Then he says it's the righteousness of God whereby we are accepted in the beloved which gives us a cancelled ticket to hell and an assured arrival to heaven. This Gospel is inclusive of any and all who believe and it's exclusive because there's no other way for those under the wrath of God to be saved except through Jesus and the grace of God is greater than our sins.

The reason Paul is eager to preach this Gospel now to the Romans because the wrath of God is now being revealed. You will never turn to the grace of God or desire more than anything else to praise God for His glorious grace, until you understand that Christ not only died for you but He died because of you. We were the children of wrath. We see this in Ephesians 2:1–9 which says *[1] And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— [3] among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. [4] But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— [6] and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. [8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

Paul gives us this back drop in Romans 1 of the wrath of God that ought to give us a heart to praise God because we're saved by the grace of God and compels us to the lost who now find themselves under God's wrath. They are living without reference to God and in unrighteousness which is the personal culture of ungodliness. When you live life without reference to God then you live life in rebellion against God – the transgression of His law, unrighteousness. Paul shows us the specific sin that pulls the trigger on the wrath of God now and the trigger is pulled because they suppress the truth in unrighteousness. This suppression is the destined failure of men and women with unrighteousness and a darkened heart to push God's truth down to the recesses of oblivion, but it won't work.

I'm going to give you the best illustration I have. We try to plan a family vacation every year where I put up with my children to spend time with their spouses who I thank God for every day and to get to see my grandchildren. My grandchildren introduced me to the boogie board which was not around when I was growing up. After spending a day at the beach you come back to jump in the pool to get off all the sand you got at the beach. Since there are no waves in the pool there is really only one thing you can do with the boogie board in the pool and that's to push it down in the water to sit or stand on it. You may get temporary success but eventually that boogie board is going to win. I can't tell you how many times that boogie board has popped back up out of the water and slapped me in the face and it's the dumbest game to play but I don't know how they get me to play it every single year. It's insanity.

That's what I'm trying to tell you about what Paul is telling us as we suppress the truth and how when that is done it creates a culture of insanity, absurdity, immorality and imbecility. It is utterly counterproductive and stupid. We think we can deify ourselves and we actually end up dehumanizing ourselves. So as we go through this text let's look at why Christ died for us and why He died because of us. What is us? There are three idolatrous exchanges we make and then there are three Divine judgments in response to those exchanges. Let's look back at

Romans 1. Remember the problem we have is not with knowledge but it's the problem of the heart and we live in a world that is a cyclorama of God's glory and majesty and the surround sound is perfect. The earth reveals His handiwork, His fingerprints and footsteps. When we suppress the truth it ends up with two markers – futile thinking and empty idolatry.

Romans 1:22–23 says [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*. In other words, we embark in our sin from our sin nature, in rebellion against God and we start a journey into imbecility. We don't quit thinking we just start futile thinking. We don't quit worshipping when we quit worshipping God, we'll worship everything but God. Let's continue on in the passage.

Romans 1:24–25 says [24] *Therefore God gave them up (over) 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*.

The covenant of sin in rebellion against God has a sacrament and it's sexual anarchy. This is our visible way to rebel against God with one of the most power appetites and passions that He has given to us that is a glorious gift in the initiation, recreation and procreation of marriage. Instead of enjoying that to the praise of God, we will take that as the outward statement of our rebellion against God in abject depravity and sexual anarchy – through fornication, adultery, pornography, etc. I am having to deal with things I would choose not to deal with but in expository preaching I'm confronted with it so since the Scriptures are inspired by God and profitable to equip us I have to deal with it. When you say 'no' to the worship of God, the worship of self will have a sacrament of idolatry which will end up being sexual anarchy. Here God-given appetites are turned into lustful passions from that darkened heart in rebellion against God and that's what happens to us as God gives us over to our sin.

You don't do this by yourself. Anyone that tells you that sexual sins are matters of personal privacy is dead wrong. Is it pornography? Then see the destruction of women's lives and families. Is it adultery? Then see the destruction of the families, marriages and children because of it. The matter of impurity to the dishonoring of God has consequences. You can even be forgiven of those sins but those consequences are unremedied. It is not just a personal matter of impurity for it becomes a societal matter in the culture – among themselves it happens Romans 1:24 says. It's not only the consequences of us but it's in the lives of others.

When we begin to confront the shame, guilt and consequences of sin we seldom repent of it unless the Holy Spirit works in our lives for what we do is what I used to call as a kid – we just double dog dare God and we go back worse. They exchange not just the glory of God but the truth of God for a lie so they go from image making to what we call straight out secular humanism – the worship of man made in the image of God as if he is god. We worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator. The paramount statement of hatred to God is the refusal to give Him worship and to give false worship to false gods. We want to take His place and it's not enough to be made in His image for we have bought the lie and exchanged it for the truth of God. Because we have done that God then does another give over for let's continue in the passage.

Romans 1:26–27 says [26] *For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions*. *For (even) 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.*

When the individual and the culture denies the truth of God for a lie then what happens is the unrestrained movement of dishonorable passions which are unnatural passions and desires. This is very important you understand this. What he is saying is an unnatural passion is not love for the same sex but a particular love for the same sex. I have three guy friends that I just love dearly but that is a *phileo* love not an *eros* love. An *eros* love for the same sex is unnatural. *Phileo* love – men to men and women to women – is necessary. It's something we need brotherly and sisterly love with each other but these two verses are talking about erotic love. This is a dishonorable passion, an unnatural passion and lust.

When someone tells you not to get so upset about this unnatural behavior and that you need to accept it because they were born that way due to a genetic disposal. One that has never been found and never will be found in honest science. The reason I believe this is because God's Word says it doesn't belong to the natural creation, due to it being unnatural. This passage in Romans 1:26–27 asks and answers it for me. They may then say to me that it's of their sin nature and I agree with that but it's of their sin nature as we work out our sin nature. You don't get a designed sin nature or a designer sin nature. I've got a promiscuous sin nature or an addictive sin nature or a thieving sin nature or homicidal sin nature or an alcoholic sin nature, etc. No, we get a sin nature and then we in response to what is around us in life and self-worship, we begin to design the outworking of that sin nature. You are not held accountable without engagement. This passage tells us how we pervert a natural passion. What you have to go through to fulfil this is not only unnatural, it is insane and absurd and the result is the due penalty in your body.

I'm all for preventive medicine but we can go after sexually transmitted diseases with treatments, medicines, shots, therapies all we want to but we will never erase them, because when you break God's law, God's law breaks you physically, spiritually, emotionally and socially – bodies, marriages, lives, families, embrace it. You can get forgiven and set free by the grace of God through Jesus who took the wrath of God that you might be saved, but that's your only solution. Yet it's a glorious solution for it not only changes your status but it breaks the power of sin and starts eradicating the practice of sin. Know that there are consequences to our sin.

Did you know if every person became a Christian, gave their life to Jesus and said they were only going to have sexual relations in marriage with my spouse for life, that in one generation we would eradicate all sexually transmitted diseases? So here we have just gone over this second step. Now thinking of the first stanza of sexual promiscuity, does this not make you think of the 1960s to the 1990s? This happened through our secular humanism. Now thinking of stanza number two, does it not make you think of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Some are reading this and thinking 'praise the Lord I'm not sexually promiscuous, or into sexual perversion or a homosexual' but hold on because you might see yourself in just a moment. There's a third stanza and if you don't see yourself in just a moment, you're a sociopath. We're about to see ourselves just by what the culture is doing around us and how we're letting the culture into us and the church. Let's look at the next stanza.

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, [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.*

In the first stanza we deny the glory of God. In the second stanza we deny the truth of God and in the third stanza we deny God. Futile thinking has now ended in a debased mind where in our personal life and our culture we have moved from total depravity to living absolute depravity when the restraints are taken away of God's common grace so we do what ought not to be done. Now Paul lists the culture of insanity, absurdity, and rebellion lived out in personal lives, our culture and society. This list is not an exhaustive one, just a selected one. Are you content? Is Jesus enough? Is your Godly ambition to know Christ and to make Him known or is our ambition the idolatry statements of the world? Do we have what we have or does what we have, have us?

When you see strife on this list have you noticed that our culture is polarized? Have you noticed that the church gets polarized over insignificant things and preferences? This is because the world who has an industry of polarization is controlling what we are thinking and saying more than the Word of God and the Spirit of God is controlling what we're thinking and saying. Have you noticed how the idolatry of this world has taken over? Did you hit a traffic jam on your way to church? No, but I will tell you that you will hit traffic jams Monday through Saturday and don't think that's a religious traffic jam. It is full of idolatry and if you get in their way you better put an ear plug in. We have turned things that were not wrong in and of themselves into idols due to the idolatry of ourselves and that is what we are seeing in society and in ourselves.

When you see deceit do you think why we write a Constitution with several hundred words for a whole nation and now we pass a regulation that requires 5,000 pages? It is because we're all trying to find loop holes that are technically on target but then go do what we want to. Have you ever wondered why we have so many lawyers? I do like most lawyers but the reason we have exploded with lawyers and therapists is because we're looking everywhere else to get order in society rather than in the heart and the Gospel goes to the heart. We have to multiply litigation and regulation because we've lost our soul and our heart. Even when we're writing to close the loopholes we're writing to open our own loophole as a politician or an elected official.

There's nothing wrong with an iPhone or computer or a television for all of those are tools. Our problem is were taking everything not only to sin but to invent new ways to sin and getting people to sin with us. We are inventors of evil as it says in Romans 1:30. Then he says disobedience to parents and when you do this it is cosmic treason against God, unless they are telling you to transgress the law of God. You might think you should have an iPhone and your parents say 'no.' Sorry, obey your parents and honor them when you don't you are saying to God that you don't want to honor the Lord. Even if we keep pushing all this down, the boogie board of truth keeps coming up and slapping us in the face. This worth death for the soul that sinneth shall surely die (Ezekiel 18:20).

We'll not only do this but we'll take more with us so we'll give approval to those who do them. When we do this, we'll change the cultural codes and declare we have a right to sin – to kill the baby in the womb that's inconvenient or maybe expensive or imperfect or unwanted. We think we have a right to end this marriage because they don't meet my needs anymore or destroy our family or to say 'no' to God in my God-given gender. We destroy manliness and womanliness. In this culture of insanity and absurdity we'll embrace the chaos of despair as we

do it personally and bring others along with us. Then we'll write, amend, change the law of the land to say we have a right to do this. In our culture we may declare rights to sin and rebel against God but no matter how many rights we invent to sin against God, sin will never be right and it will never get rid of the shame or the guilt.

So here is the takeaway. When God gives us over to our sin, it inevitably leads to a culture lifestyle of insanity, absurdity, unrestrained sexual anarchy of valid appetites into lust of the heart, then dishonorable lusts and despair marked by an unrelenting rebellion against the glory of God. Praise God, but one of the blessings of God giving us over in this day is to tell us to surrender and give ourselves over to Him so that we'll not be sent away in that day. God has done something glorious for us to save us. The mark of suppression of truth and rebellion against God will be sophisticated, futile thinking, the emptiness of idolatry and when God gives us over the sacraments of rebellion will be revealed through sexual promiscuity, sexual perversion and social approval of rebellion against God. No matter how many people we get to sin with us and get it codified – the right to sin will never be right and you will not be able to keep the truth underwater. God's truth will come up with God giving us over.

We can keep raising our fist in the face of God by not giving Him praise or glory or honor and then God raises His hand, not in a benediction but in a malediction and then says 'thy will be done.' Not only is our sin calling for God's wrath but the death spiral of our sin is God's wrath. Not only does our rebellion with passions unleashed and unrestrained as unnatural passions are embraced with social approval of rebellion against God, call for God's judgment but the reality is its presence is God's judgment – the wrath of God revealed.

Don't Christians struggle with these things? Absolutely. I'd like to share a verse with you in closing from I Corinthians 6. If ever there was an exhibit A for everything I have just shared in this study from the first century it was Corinth for the word Corinthian meant a sexual pagan in that day. Paul came there and planted a church and 18 months after he was there this is what he wrote.

I Corinthians 6:9–11 says [9] *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.*

Does this sound familiar? To inherit God's Kingdom is a gift but those who don't are those under the dominion of this sin. I don't know if you know Jesus or not today and if you don't know Jesus and find yourself in this downward spiral into this cesspool of immorality, insanity and imbecility of this culture and society, I tell you there is a glorious 'but' and that is that Jesus loves to save sinners. Give yourself over to Christ and let Him takeover, then you won't be given over.

The reason people were saved in Corinth is because the Apostle Paul came and planted a church on mission, on message and in ministry. He didn't go to transform that culture, he went to transform sinners and look what happened. He told them about a Gospel that will take you right where you are, Mr or Ms homosexual, adulterer, addicted, thief etc., when you put your trust in Him and turn from your sin and He will make you right with the righteousness of God. He will set you free through the power of God. Then He will begin to work on you and in you so that you can say you are not only legally right with God but no longer is that your life.

Christians who are saved don't go around saying 'I'm a promiscuous Christian or a homosexual Christian, or a pornographic Christian or adulterous Christian.' Of those sins six of them were dominating my life when I was converted and some of them He microwaved out the next day, some of them we have been killing by the power of the Spirit every day of my life since then. I thank God for Lord's Day worship that can fill up my heart with the means of grace so that there is no room for that old man to get its tentacles back in my heart. I thank God for every morning in His Word that I can meet with Him so that I'm ready not to give the devil an opportunity to bring that old man back with its passions.

That is what God grants to us by His grace. You have the deaclyative blessings of the Gospel – you're right with God, justified and adopted. You have the transformation blessings of the Gospel – you're regenerated, born again, sanctified, you growing in the grace of the Lord Jesus, not for grace, with worship, preaching, discipleship, and evangelism. You don't take those things to name yourself. These things ought not to be even named among us, much less our identity. When they crop up we don't manage them, we mortify them, kill them, and flee temptation as we put to death the old man daily to live out of the love of Christ to follow Him.

This is why we don't want to suppress truth. We want to hunger for truth. May the Word of God be preached and may I meditate on it. We don't want idolatry. We want to be true worshippers to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Praise the Lord for the Lord's Day where He gathers all of this together to bless our souls. The reason I can say this is in Christ alone, at Calvary the wrath of God was satisfied and the love of God in Christ is magnified.

There are three more 'give overs' in the book of Romans that we haven't gotten to yet and I've given you three already in this study. I'm going to give you one of the three coming up because it's why we can be on mission with a great message, the Gospel. Romans 8:31–32 says *[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 (gave over) for us all, how will he not also with Him graciously give us all things?* God gave His Son over for us that we might have all things in Him. We are no longer the children of wrath, why? It was because the Son of God went to Calvary and bore the wrath of God for us and that's why we can say 'such were some of you' (I Corinthians 6:11). That's what we take on mission, on message and in ministry to the Corinthians, Corinth of our world, to our own nation and we get to go to the heart. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the privilege to be in Your Word and for the great, awesome, honor to exalt Christ. Thank You for this such challenging text that is so intricate and intense but I pray You have overruled my inadequacies and that the Spirit of the living God would be speaking right now to those who have read this and are seeking. May they say 'no' to the wrath of God and come to Jesus the Lamb of God who because of our sin took away the wrath of God at Calvary so that we can be saved by the grace of God – dying for us to take away from us what caused Him to go there out of love for us. God, draw them to Jesus today. If you want to talk and pray with someone please contact us at (205) 776-5200 for we'd love to share with you about this Jesus who freely saves. Father, those of us who are now rescued may next time we love to gather for worship to worship You as it sets the thermostat for our lives in worship so that we can be a witness to this world that needs the salt and light of Your church, doing its job to send Your people into this world who are prepared to say 'no' to the world that is trying to get in them and 'yes' to Jesus that the world might come to the Savior. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

THE CULTURAL DEATH SPIRAL OF SIN

Three Idolatrous Exchanges

Three Divine Judgments

LIFE TAKEAWAY

*When God “gives us over” to our sin, it inevitably leads to a Culture/Lifestyle of Insanity, Absurdity, Sexual Anarchy and Despair marked by an unrelenting rebellion against the Glory of God...*

*But...*