

Romans 1:18–32: Wrath At Work

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Preacher: Arthur Jackson

[0 : 0 0] Good afternoon. Our scripture reading today is taken from Romans chapter 1 verses 18 through 32 and can be found on page 914 of the Red Bibles in the pews. At this time any children up to fifth grade and their workers are dismissed for their programs.

Once again that's Romans chapter 1 verses 18 through 32. Please stand for the reading of God's word.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes namely his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 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.

Claiming to be wise they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves because they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worship and serve the creature rather than the creator who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions for their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature 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. 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. 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, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know

God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. This is the word of the Lord. Please be seated.

[2 : 5 9] Good afternoon. I believe that I speak for Pastor Helm as well as myself when I say we are so grateful to be able to serve this congregation in the way that we do.

Through study and proclamation of the word as well as in other pastoral kinds of ways. What an honor to be able to do what we do in the name of Jesus.

Dear Lord, thank you for your word this afternoon and all that has transpired up to this point. Pray that you would be glorified in us in Christ's name.

Amen. I was listening to our normal response after the reading of that particular passage and I still heard us say thanks be to God.

We come this afternoon to the first major section of the letter to the Romans.

[4 : 1 0] We've gotten through the introduction the theme or the thesis statement on last week. So when we come to this particular passage we come to an absolute rhetorical masterpiece.

A rhetorical gem. Paul's skill in the use of language using it effectively and persuasively in this particular passage on today is superb.

In the rhetorical sense verses 18 through 32 it seems like and I haven't heard a commentator say this but as I would understand it they are unrivaled in Pauline literature as you look and see the way that he presents his case in a very complimentary kind of way along with the content he says it in a way that really lands with power.

With careful thought and skill Paul begins what could be called a state of the human race kind of address.

This past week President Barack Obama in his State of the Union address he highlighted the accomplishments of his administration and the American people.

[6 : 02] The economy is moving unemployment figures are headed in the right direction American military interests are being advanced on foreign soil.

at different points in the speech you could see and hear that the president was affirmed he was affirmed in what he said by laughter he was affirmed by hand clapping he was affirmed even by standing ovation and those were fitting responses for much of what he said but when we come to this passage on today those kinds of expressions are sort of out of place here indeed in my study and preparation of this particular passage it has sobered me it has prompted prayers for my own self as well as for others as I more fully understood the words that are here before us on today no clapping no standing no applause because here the human race is exposed and indicted and shown to be at odds with the

God of heaven here we see why is the gospel that Paul is not ashamed of why is the gospel needed so Paul lays before his readers and us the universal need for the gospel he begins that here in 118 and he will take us all the way through chapter 3 and verse 20 and then pick up where he left off in verse 17 by the time that this indictment is fully read Paul will have laid out heaven's charges against all humanity Gentile and Jew alike and absolutely every one of them every one of us will be shown to be guilty now there are going to be those as we will see in the weeks to come that are going to rebut some of those charges but Paul will likewise come back around and when he ends up he'll show that all have been inflicted with the same disease all therefore needing the same cure so we look at our text look at chapter 1 and verse 18 it's been read but let me read it again for the wrath of

God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness and hear this they suppress the truth you remember in verse 17 we saw the righteousness of God revealed the same word is used here but the wrath of God is the subject!

popular topic is it oh we love to hear about the love of God we sing about it we write about it but here it's the wrath of God and though there are some who would take issue with the idea of God's wrath it too is very much an attribute of the almighty God of heaven who has every right to call men to conform to his standards and to punish those who don't scripture of course speaks about a future time a time of future wrath when God will execute punishment on those who have resisted his will but here it's in the present wrath is revealed or is being revealed and what this does it leads us to conclude that the reference is not to a time in the future but to a present historical expression of divine wrath and as we look in this particular text today we will see what that is the teachings of this passage is that corruptions and perversions of human life are expressions of

[11 : 41] God's present wrath even today this divine abandonment as it's been called to human degradation should serve to warn us of a future and final consignment to wrath of those who choose to ignore God but also it should be an awakening factor to us as we look and see the rampant spread of human degradation in our day and we must ask what is this where is it coming from God's wrath is revealed but what about the target of God's wrath we see that don't we it's against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth target irreverent ungodly unrighteous people who suppress the truth that has been presented to them about

God they are the objects of God's wrath suppress the truth that's the terminology in the text and the idea behind this suppress is to incarcerate to hold down to hinder to repress the holding back truth about God as revealed in creation it's what's in view I think R.C.

Sproul got it right when he calls this suppression of truth the chief sin of humanity huh the suppression of sins runs throughout this particular process matter of fact look at verse 28 it's expressed a little differently but it says and since they did not see fit to acknowledge God that's synonymous there with the suppression of truth huh though truth about God is plain in the world because God has shown it huh because and guess what God is the master teacher and he is teaching all the time and there's this sort of educational programming within the fabric of nature and creation itself he's the master teacher and he's shown it to them but mankind is guilty of suppressing holding down the truth about God as you look at the passage there's one way that will help us to really grasp and to understand what's going on here is that to see the primary subject in the verses it's a lot here but the way that it's laid out if you look at verses 19 and 20 the primary subject there is

God and I hope you as we get further along in verses 21 and 22 primary subject that's being referred to there is man in verses 24 through 27 God comes back into focus into view again and in 28 through 32 man again is the primary focus this is not to say that man or God does not enter into the picture in the other sets but again as far as the primary focus in these verses look at verses 19 and 20 for what can be known about God notice it's plain to them how because God has shown it to them it's there for his invisible attributes namely his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in things that have been made created honor so that they are without excuse huh things that are knowable about God how do we know about

God we know them through the things his works the things that he has made created order and it's from the beginning of the world these kinds of things so it's not just something new again it was from the beginning that God spoke or has spoken through natural revelation huh because of the clear witness of God and created honor man therefore is without excuse but we as humans we have failed to respond to God in ways that match the way in which he has revealed himself to us creation's witness to God is clear and it's a powerful powerful witness that he gives through it a few weeks ago we had the redemption of reason seminar and

[17 : 08] Dr. John Walford was there he's the professor of art history and photography at Wheaton College and he commented on this particular somewhat in passing this verse but these are his comments and I quote he says one of the most long-standing of Christian beliefs is that God has made himself known in manifold ways not only through the written word of scripture and through the incarnation of his son Jesus but also through the creation about which is written in the book of Romans and he quotes verse 20 this vast this has vast implications for visual artists since it affirms the reality that the material world including artistic media have the innate potential to make visible a truth and a reality beyond themselves that's what God does through creation he presents and in his artistic rendition and his fingerprints are all over creation he reveals things that are bigger than the picture the canvas of nature itself consider artists and I had the privilege of going down to the gallery this past week to see

Fujimoro's work there that was still being there and as I looked at the color that was there and the gilded kind of the paintings that were there what was going on in the mind of this guy when he did this I mean it would take me several lifetimes to do that kind of thing but God has so gifted him in that way but artists who communicate through images composers do so through songs but God the original artist and he so marvellously expressed himself on the canvas of nature and there are those who sit transfixed at artists pieces for hours gazing at the work trying to discern what's in the mind or the heart or the experience of the author but God's works in creation friends call for us to do the same you ever just go by the lakefront in the summertime and just behold the wonder of what's there and all that marvelous scene across the lake the skyline skyline of Chicago man-made though it be it's beautiful comes into view on all the various intricacies in

God's in his multi kind of talented expertise that is explained in land forms and and seeds and animals and all of those kinds of things what an awesome creator the psalmist speaks about it doesn't he in psalm 19 the heavens declare the glory of God and the expanse shows his handiwork what a mighty God made himself known created order but look in verses 21 through 23 man's activities come into view here and so for though although they know God know about knew God know about him they did not honor him as God or give him thanks but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were dark and claiming to be wise they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal

God for things resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things huh they're without excuse because of how God has manifested himself in nature but even with that with the creative beauty of the almighty they refused to honor God they knew God through creation but didn't honor him as God they did not notice what things they didn't do they didn't give him thanks they didn't give him worship but rather than that they went the wrong way became futile and their hearts were darkened how foolish it is friends to ignore God whether it's through created order or through Christ or conscience turn him a deaf ear to not acknowledge him verse 23 we have the first of three exchange transactions verse 23 verse 25 verse 26 the activity of man there in the exchange business in a sense for those who are enlightened it is a senseless exchange to those who are in darkness it's just sort of par for the course it's what those in darkness do they make foolish choices and make foolish exchanges and here they exchange all the glories of the invisible

God for things that they can see images idols idols made in the likeness of men and birds and animals and creeping things you remember in Exodus when Moses was in the mount with the invisible God and when he came down Aaron had made a golden calf and he said these be the gods of Israel that brought you out of and while God was on the mountain speaking and having a plan for his people's well-being they in their folly were asking for that which could be seen what's in view idolatry that's what one is left with when the truth about God is suppressed you're left with lies those who refuse to listen to God are left to listen to other voices those who suppress the truth are by default subjected to lies glory of their mortal

[23 : 47] God and all that goes with it for lifeless images resembling man and beast the utter foolishness of idolatry God's activities comes into view hello look at this and we see that it's looking back at what has been said in the previous verses that therefore in verse 24 God gave them up in the lust of their hearts to impurity to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves notice it's sort of like the first domino that drops is the suppression of truth and from there when that happens all of the possibilities of human degradation are there and present and one can enter into them the glory of their martyr

God the word therefore sees looks back at the previous verses because they had ignored God and given themselves over to idolatry God then gives them up to the desires of their hearts to the impurity to dishonoring their bodies listen to this among themselves huh we in verse 24 we have the first of three God gave them ups three exchanges and three times we hear God gave them up what's behind this particular expression in the old testament the word was used to describe when the Lord either handed over Israel's enemies or Israel herself to defeat the idea is that God hands people over listen to this to what they give themselves to it is a divine abandonment as it were a divine consignment to their perverted twisted appetites huh why were they abandoned to their own desires because of the second exchange in verse 25 because they exchanged the truth of

God for a lie and a lie is another word for an idol we see that in Amos chapter 2 verse 4 we see that in Jeremiah 16 19 and 20 just an expression for an idol it's the exchange about God for a lie and idolatrous worship notice the pattern suppression of the truth leading to idolatry idolatry led to unrestrained conduct in the human sphere specifically sexual misconduct is in view such sexual impurity went hand in glove with idolatrous worship of old even in Corinth where Paul was writing from he was surrounded by an idolatrous temples that included prostitution as a worship ritual it was in that day and just think of our day friends those who have chosen to suppress the knowledge of God what they know about him to ignore him and all the various things that would be ashamed many of them to mention them they've given themselves to them of course 26

Paul's state of the human race presentation is not pretty and it gets even worse in verse 26 there we see the second of the three God gave them up expressions look here he is for this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions for their women exchanged natural notice the different times where natural or nature is mentioned here for those that were contrary to nature and the men likewise gave up natural relations divine consignment here is to dishonorable passions the very term itself suggests that there are honorable passions desires legitimate desires that were programmed into our first parents

God programmed those desires and passions when God in Genesis brings Eve to Adam he said basically he said wow God in his grace grace he sort of cut her out of the same pattern in a sense but he had a way of putting curves in the right place and softness in the right place brothers you can say amen if you want to but that's the way that God did it by design he did it and he programmed us and notice created order was male and female created him he them with the right person at the right time within the right covenantal context again when

[30 : 05] Adam when the Lord brought Eve to Adam it wasn't long before nature took its course but that's not what's in view here the relationships in verse 27 are those that are out of sync with nature female with female sexual relationships and male with male sexual relationships violate nature the condemnation of homosexual conduct doesn't get any stronger than what we see here and hear this friends the English translations are rather tame as we look at the various translation options that really could be considered here as far as what is really being talked about in this particular verse but the message is clear not according to created order not according to nature a perversion of nature the picture here is that of perverted passion passions run amok the language is quite telling isn't it listen to it consumed with passion committing shameless acts the result is seen in the last part of the verse and they are receiving due penalty for their error progression suppression about truth led to idolatry idolatry to unrestrained conduct in the human sphere human degradation friends can be traced to the to true worship at the wrong altars worship at the wrong altars human degradation can be traced there whether it is the altar of self the altar of sex the altar of materialism those kinds of things if we are given over to them ignoring

God the punishment fits the sin and it's not just future part of the punishment is the consignment to those very kinds of things human degradation friends can be traced to the suppression of truth we know about that don't we where we have in an act or in a season of life that we've just sort of gone away from what we know and there are people today that would long just to be able to get back before they had been locked into a lifestyle or a pattern of living that if they could do it again they would do it differently and such human degradation is an expression of God's present wrath in the human sphere look at verse 28 it goes back to verse 18 where we see suppression of the truth the idea here is similar they did not see fit to acknowledge

God and because of that and there's the third God gave them up in this verse it's interesting what the Lord consigns them to a debased mind we've gone from the Lord giving people over to the lust of their hearts verse 25 to dishonorable passions verse 26 to a debased mind that to do listen to what ought not to be done ought not to be done the very phrasing should catch the tensions of those who value the life of the mind the elevation of learning while such endeavors are to be applauded even those who give themselves to the elevation of the mind can be guilty of not seeing fit to acknowledge God and thereby be given over to a debased mind how many brilliant people are there in an academic community who reason

God away who suppress the truth through various philosophies and so called science those things are fine within themselves but when they cause you to suppress truth about God and ignore him beware from sexual morality there's a shift here in verse 28 to a broader more broad social impropriety that includes a catalog a list of 21 vices the rhetoric of the passage adds to the weight of the message Paul comes to the end of this section he concludes it with the list and such lists in antiquity were not strange he's wrapping up the first part of the indictment and he does so masterfully landing with a crescendo of sorts the words sort of roll out notice that those who suppress the truth of

God are revealed in creation were filled with four things they were filled with all manner of unrighteousness evil covetousness and malice and then presently they are full there's this principle of exposition that we have which says that you need to go to Corinth before you go to Chicago so what that means is really getting into the text and here and as so many times when we see what there is in the original setting we automatically find ourselves in today that's what we have here as we look and see what was going on in that day in reality we have it going on in our day they are full of envy malice strife deceit maliciousness and notice what they are they are gossip slanderers haters of

[36 : 44] God insolent haughty boasters inventors of evil disobedient to parents foolish fatherless heartless ruthless and in the original it just rolls out so beautifully with with both the prefixes and the word endings landing on that listening audience in a sense with beauty but also heavy weight huh gripping to the ear but hopefully more so to the heart but they know they know but still they do them verse 32 not only that they give approval to those who practice them there is a fraternity amongst the lost ones what are we saying here today God has revealed himself humankind in their unrighteousness have resisted stifled smothered the truth that God has revealed about himself and they persist in unrighteousness do we live in a world that ignores

God today we do do we not live in a world that worships but they worship at the wrong altars a chief God in the pantheon of this world is indeed sex do we not live in a world that has given itself over to sexual immorality and these things Ephesians speaks well let not these things be named among you as those who name the name of Christ on in Romans chapter 12 I beseech you brothers Christians that you give give yourselves that you present your bodies a living sacrifice holy acceptable God that's your spiritual worship that applies to us that's our call in this world as those who have been enlightened let not these things be named among you and I know I'm speaking to those who are in the college context

I know that I'm speaking to resident heads who oversee houses and dorms but as in this context for some of you maybe the first time away from home don't get caught up with what's going on around you be a witness in a light even in the midst of this darkness and degradation and live in a way such that there may be those who want to be released and get out of it what do you do you take them back 1 16 and 17 the gospel is the power of God to salvation to deliver to rescue so not only has wrath been revealed but righteousness has been revealed how through the gospel do we not live in a world that's presently under God's wrath and marked for God's wrath that was the case at the time of writing and so today what this means is that ours is a world that is both guilty before

God but also right for the gospel of God and hearing a passage like this friends should force us to examine three things number one what are you bowing down to what altar are you worshipping at what are you looking at what are you reading and is this so we don't have to go to a bravo today the bravo can come to us in so many ways visually virtually beware huh it's examine our worship but it should examine our we should examine our walk how are we living our conduct before God well we don't want to see ourselves as believers we don't want to see our reflection in

Romans chapter one verses eighteen through thirty two we should examine our walk what needs to be changed what needs to be adjusted in view of what we see here what patterns need to be broken what needs to be jettisoned from your life and mine but also we need to examine our witness oh when we see people who are planted birth feet here they are right for the witness of the gospel may God give us grace to be positively active functioning all things huh the sentence for ignoring God idolatry the sentence for idolatry given over to immorality the sentence for immorality being given over to the base mind to do what not ought to be done we'll look more in the cure but you and I know what it's in the mercy of God let us pray

[42 : 20] Lord we come to you this afternoon humbled sobered but resting in your grace through the power of your spirit may we find ourselves fleeing to you loving you honoring you praying to you in Christ's name through the through the through the thing through the thing through the thing through the thing through the thing through the