

THE WRATH OF GOD IS ALIVE AND WELL

Romans 1:26-32

Bob Bonner

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According to a Weather Channel article I read this past week, 2017 has been the deadliest year for tornados in nine years! Here's a map of all of the tornados as of May 5th. Thus far, there have been thirty-eight deaths caused by tornados, while the entire of last year saw only seventeen deaths. And we have only begun the tornado season!

Tornadoes are unique events. They fall into the category of "natural disasters". Some people have another description for such disasters and call them "Acts of God." They include floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, pestilence, hail, and fire and brimstone. People call these disasters "Acts of God" because Biblically at specific times in the past, God used these events in nature to bring judgment upon people who suppressed the truth about God or who exchanged the truth about God for a lie or futile human speculation and theories about life.

Contrary to what some believe, not all natural disasters are demonstrations of God's wrath. Only those events that God specifically declared to be His wrath as a result of people's sinful actions can be rightfully called acts of God or the wrath of God. According to **Romans 8:20-21**, other natural disasters can occur because of God's curse against the earth at the time of the sin of Adam and Eve.

In **Romans 1:18-22**, Paul tells us that God's wrath is alive and well these days. Furthermore, he tells us that there is a specific unmistakable action of human beings that brings about God's wrath today. It is the suppressing of the truth about God and the exchanging of that truth for a lie or for futilely thinking that they have a better plan than God's to live life. Following **verse 23**, Paul goes on to reveal how God demonstrates his ongoing wrath against a rebellious humanity. Paul uses a phrase that he repeats three times to explain God's visible wrath today. The phrase is "**God gave them over,**" in **verses 24, 26, 28**.

Last week, we only touched on this subject of God's wrath. Last time I

defined God's revealed wrath today this way: God's wrath = "**God gave them over**" = a judicial abandonment of the human race to the consequences of its rebellion. Others have put it more simply. They have said that God's wrath is, "God's giving us what we want, even though He knows that our self-destructive desires are not good for us, so that we will experience what life is really like when we live as though God does not exist."

What could God possibly hope to gain by turning us over to the destructive consequences of our own rebellion against Him and the suppression of truth about God? Why would he just turn us loose?

I see three reasons that God expresses His wrath in such a manner. First, God reveals His wrath in such a measurable way because He wants us to experience what life will be like when we live as though He doesn't exist. God wants to make it so obvious to all that the moral decay of our lives and our society is the result of our ignoring Him.

His second reason for turning us loose to our own evil desires is so that all people will see that, apart from Him, they are helpless to figure out or to solve the problems they have brought upon themselves by suppressing the truth about God. Why would He want us to see how helpless we are to solve the problem we have caused for ourselves? Because God want us to be like the prodigal son, who through experiencing the painful consequences of his own foolish decisions, ultimately came to his senses and returned home to his earthly father. God wants that to be the same outcome for us--that we would return home to the Lord, fall upon His loving kindness and mercy, and be forgiven and reconciled to God the Father so that we can experience and enjoy an eternal intimate relationship with Him.

Thirdly, God is revealing His wrath for all to see so that when God's final judgment comes after death, all who have not turned to Jesus Christ for salvation will have no excuse for being condemned to hell or any cause to blame God for the outcome of their lives. In short, God wants us to realize that His eternal judgment of some people is correct and well deserved.

In the end, God is not some cruel, despicable, egotistic ogre who wants to ruin your life; but rather, God is the One who created you, loves you, and wants to rescue and redeem you so that you will experience the abundant life

He created you to enjoy. But at the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that God is also the only righteous judge who must judge righteously.

Last week, we embarked on a major section of the book of **Romans** that speaks to the evidence of God's rightful condemnation of a humanity that has suppressed the truth about God and exchanged that truth with lies and futile speculations. That section covers **1:24-3:20**.

In **Romans 1:24-3:20**, Paul gets very specific about God's rightful condemnation of humanity. In this section, Paul discusses four groups of people: He mentions the HEDONIST (**1:24-32**) first because this is the group that leads the parade to the downfall of a nation. This is the group we will begin looking at in a moment. Then, we have the SELF-RIGHTEOUS MORALIST (**2:1-11**), followed by the ENLIGHTENED PAGAN (**2:12-16**), and finally the RELIGIONIST (**2:17-3:8**). In **3:9-20** Paul closes the section with his conclusion that all people, apart from those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ, stand condemned before God. On our own, no one would be able to stand before the perfect and holy God and make a successful argument for His acceptance of them based on their own merit.

This morning, we return to our study of the hedonist. A hedonist is one who has turned his back on God to worship or seek after personal pleasure at the expense of all else. The hedonist motto is, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we will die!" In **verses 24-32** Paul illustrates how God-ignoring, foolish mankind suppresses the truth about God and how God responds to our suppressing the truth. In these verses, I see a four-part breakdown of human life that is the result of hedonism. The first manifestation of hedonism to be mentioned in this section is found in **verses 24-27** and represents the driving factor, the billboard that represents a society, like the city of Corinth or Rome or Grants Pass, which were and are engulfed by hedonism. It points to the breakdown of human sexuality. Then, in **verse 28**, we learn of the mental breakdown of a hedonist. In **verses 29-31** we see the overall relational breakdown of the hedonist. People just don't know how to play fair or live at peace with one another. And finally, when the majority of the society becomes hedonistic, we see the communal breakdown of the hedonist in **verse 32**.

Last time we began with the human sexual breakdown, in **verses 24-25** and the Apostle Paul continues this sign of hedonistic breakdown in **verses 26-27**. But before we go any further, I think it is reasonable for us to ask and answer another obvious question: “Why is sex such a big deal to us and to God?”

There are many reasons for this, but let me begin by first defining what sexuality is. Somebody once defined sexuality as “the urge to merge.” Like all urges we face in life (to have sex, to eat, to possess a new object, or to dispose of our human waste), sex needs to be controlled and guided. We simply don’t do these things whenever or wherever or however we feel like it. To do so can have dire consequences to us and those around us.

Here is another fuller definition: Sex is the urge to possess someone else and to be possessed by someone else. When speaking of “possessing” someone, I’m not referring to just the physical relationship. True sexuality, as God intended it, is something meant to touch the whole person. Let me demonstrate: As humans, we are made up of a body, soul, and spirit. Most of the time when we talk about sex or the desire to possess someone else and to be possessed by someone, we deny or ignore what God says is true about us. We ignore the reality that we are one being made up of three inseparable parts. As a result, we think of sex as only being the physical possessing of someone else’s body or their possessing ours.

But true sexuality has two other dimensions as well as the physical. To discover God’s design for the most fulfilling sex life, we cannot ignore these other two dimensions. When we ignore them, we end up with a less fulfilling sex life.

For instance, the key to who we are as human beings does not rest with our bodies. They are going to wrinkle, sag, wear out, and then die! Praise God, we will get a resurrection body later, and these bodies are temporary. The key to who we are as individuals, and that which makes us higher than the animals, is that God gave us something He did not give the animals. He gave us a spirit, which enables us to commune or connect with His Spirit. What do we call our urge to merge with God? Worship. **Psalm 42:1** declares, “**As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul [literally “spirit”] pants for You, O God.**” We want God to possess us as we want to possess Him.

In Jesus' last discussion with His disciples in the upper room in **John 15**, Jesus says over and over in different ways, "**You in me and I in you.**" That's the greatest expression of our desire to be spiritually possessed by God in scripture.

From the spirit is developed "soul sex." This is expressed in our urge to share information about ourselves with others. It's the urge to communicate our feelings, thoughts, dreams, and aspirations. We call this friendship; it is a form of soulish sexuality. For instance, have you ever felt lonely and wished you had someone to talk to? That's the urge to merge soulishly with another. Have you ever felt a sweet deep connection with someone of the same sex, a genuine healthy friendship affection for that person? That's the kind of friendship or soul sex that David and Jonathan enjoyed.

It's a natural part of maturity shared by many of us here today. There is no sin in the attraction of a man to another man or a woman to another woman, as David and Jonathan were not in sin. It is sin to carry that relationship too far and cross the line to act out sexually, just like it is sin for a man to cross the line of soulish sex with a woman to whom he is not married.

Unfortunately, today many young people are confused about these genuine and heartfelt feelings for another of the same sex. Because of the misguided gay agenda, our young people, who wonder why they are more comfortable with their same sex and have a deep love for a friend, are told by the gay community, "Oh, you must be gay! Good for you!" That's not being gay. That's simply having a soulish bond with another of the same sex, and there is nothing wrong with that. Can it lead to a bad thing, a homosexual relationship? Sure it can, just like a married person having fond feelings for someone of the opposite sex who is not their spouse. If one's feelings are allowed to cross biblical lines into adultery or homosexuality, both are wrong.

In fact, the Greek word used in the Bible to describe such actions is the same for homosexuality, adultery, bestiality, and pedophilia. It is the word "pornea," from which we get our word, "pornography." Should a person cross the line in soul sex into what God has declared is an illicit relationship, whether it be adultery, homosexuality, or pedophilia, God considers it all the

same thing: exchanging the truth for a lie, which is suppressing the truth about God, which is sin.

The way we are sexually designed by God is that as we first learn to merge with Him, then we discover meaningful healthy soulful merging with people. We discover what true biblical friendship involves. As a couple continue to seek after Him together, this leads to the building of and the maintaining of a strong marital relationship. As a man and woman begin courting and learn how to pray together, something wonderful happens within their spirit. They naturally, as God designed it, want to merge together physically. Under God's design, as a Christian man and woman first seek after Him spiritually, then at the right time, God will bring this couple together in a friendship. As they enjoy getting to know each other's heart, or engage in "soul sex," this will lead to the desire for marriage where they can enjoy the whole sexual package that God designed for a man and woman. To be "**one flesh**" is to join together their spirits, souls, and bodies. Notice the order: Life enriching sexuality begins in the spirit, moves to the soul, and then involves the body.

Understanding this, I warn unmarried couples that one of the most dangerous things you can do is to pray together privately. Something naturally powerful happens between a couple's spirits and souls when they pray together. God means for it to move them toward marriage and a physical merging together.

Here's a true story: I know of a godly young couple who were courting. They had a practice of praying privately together on a weekly basis for the outreach on their college campus. One day one of them, without a word, suddenly bolted from the room and abandoned the other, who was left shocked and bewildered as to what had just happened. The one found out later that the young collegian bolted because of a sudden unexpected physical desire or urge to physically merge with her Christian counterpart. The only thing this collegian knew to do was to flee temptation! They had both decided that if God wanted them to marry, they would save their physical merging until after the wedding. And they did.

This natural God-designed process God meant for good, but Satan tries to turn it toward evil. Satan always wants to tempt or to deceive people to approach sexuality differently than how God designed it. In the end, many

have exchanged the truth of God's plan for great sex for a lie. Deceived by the evil one, many go about this sexual process backwards. They buy into this idea of, "Oh, let's live together and see if we are a good match. And then we will get married!" They start with the physical and hope they can then really get to know one another, to have soul-sex, and then maybe become tied spiritually. This approach results in just the opposite of what God's design was meant to produce. Rather than producing life-enriching sexuality, it leads to just the opposite. Life disillusioning sexuality begins in the body, attempts to move to the soul, and never reaches the spirit.

But what happens when we ignore God or the spiritual side of the urge to merge? What happens when we no longer worship God in spirit and in truth? Soulful friendships become less satisfying and meaningful than what they could be. People don't know how to maintain a healthy relationship with another when, say, a trust is broken. They wrestle with the inability to forgive and find freedom from the bitterness of being violated in some form. When we don't find freedom from bitterness, we are engulfed with a poison that spreads to our other relationships. Soon, rather than enjoying mutually satisfying relationships with others, we become selfish takers rather than givers and forgivers who build and maintain healthy bonds. The person who ignores God's design for merging in any relationship usually finds that most of their friendships are shallow or short-lived.

And then when that loneliness becomes great enough, we try to meet the need to be possessed by God and friends not in meaningful relationships, but in physical sexual escapades with others, in fantasies about lovers, in viewing pornography, or in illicit relationships, whether heterosexual or homosexual. In the end, our true need to have spirit, soul, and body needs fully met gets foiled, all because we have exchanged the truth for a lie.

So why is sex such a big deal to God and us? Because we were created essentially to be sexual beings. We desire to possess and be possessed, first and foremost by God and then by others.

So let's read those verses that deal with the Hedonist's sexual breakdown that comes as a result of suppressing the truth about God and his instructions for human sexuality, and how sinners exchange the truth of God for a lie. The first two verses we looked at last time deal with the breakdown in

heterosexual relationships. We read:

²⁴Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

²⁵For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.

Amen.

From there, Paul points to the Hedonist's sexual breakdown as it manifests itself in homosexuality, in **verses 26-27**.

²⁶For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; [an expression that clearly is connoting that these are activities that are contrary to God's will] for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural [or more literally "against nature"], ²⁷and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

That term "**natural**" refers to God's fixed manner in creation. The term "**function**" was commonly used for sexual intercourse or intimate sexual relations. Hence "**natural function**" refers to the heterosexual relationship that God designed in creation and highlights throughout scripture. "**Unnatural**" refers to a same sex or homosexual physical relationship as spelled out in God's Law as being an "**abomination**."

For instance, we read this about homosexuality in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah in **Genesis 19:4-5**.

⁴Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter; ⁵and they called to Lot and said to him, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them.”

There are some homosexuals today who say that God did not destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for the practice of homosexuality, but for the lack of showing hospitality. But this verse, plus what is written in **Jude 7**, makes that argument clearly wrong. For in **Jude**, in the context of God’s promise to pronounce eternal judgment against people, we read this:

⁷Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.

Then in **Leviticus 18:22**, we read, “**You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.**” And then two chapters later, we read in **Leviticus 20:13**, “**If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.**”

Anyone who is serious about “**rightly dividing the Word of truth**” or correctly representing what God’s Word has to say about homosexuality, cannot say with any accuracy at all that God supports the gay lifestyle. If God’s Word supported the gay lifestyle as part of his will, Paul would never have written the words that those who practice homosexuality are “**receiving**

in their own persons the due penalty of their error.” Why would God cause a homosexual to receive a penalty if it was something God ordained? Why would God call such a person in “**error**” if this activity was permissible by God? To take such a stance in support of homosexuality is clearly suppressing the truth of what God has to say about human sexuality. It is to exchange the truth of God with a lie.

And here is another thing. Let’s clear up what has been an incorrect application about this “**due penalty**” of which Paul writes. The penalty is not AIDS. I say this for two reasons: First, AIDS strikes many more people than homosexuals. Often, totally innocent people who have had no sexual contact of any kind are afflicted. Some are born with it, and others get it through blood transfusions or coming into contact with infected blood. Secondly, AIDS does not afflict all homosexual offenders.

From my counseling of those who have been homosexuals and from hearing their stories, I believe Paul’s reference to “**receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error**” is a reference to the confusion and loss of one’s true person and sexual identity and all the emotional trauma that goes with that. Unfortunately, the lie of the gay community states that if we only accepted them and their behavior as a normal alternative lifestyle, then there would be no more confusion or emotional trauma suffered by homosexuals. To say that and to believe that totally ignores and suppresses the truth of what God has said about sin throughout scripture. Making sin permissible will never remove the penalty of God’s wrath as described here, something that brings confusion and emotional trauma to the homosexual and to the friends and family who recognize that this practice is not of God.

Allow me to offer a brief word encouragement and hope to any who may be wrestling with either feelings or even participation in homosexual activity. Homosexuality is not the result of a genetic defect any more than adultery is the result of a genetic defect. Like adultery, the act of homosexuality is a sin by choice. Every study to date that has tried to prove that homosexuality is a genetic defect at birth has been proven biased and fraudulent in its research. And that ought to be encouraging to you, because there is a remedy for sin and even addictions to sinful practices, whether it is alcoholism, eating disorders, homosexuality, adultery, or viewing pornography. However, for many genetic defects there is no cure.

Let it be further understood that God does not consider the sin of homosexuality to be any worse than adultery or slander or greed or seeking self-glory. A homosexual is not a worse sinner than I am. As I look back on my life before I came to Christ and before He began His transforming work, I agree with the Apostle Paul, “I’m the worst of the worst, the chiefest of sinners.” If there is any hope of love, grace, and forgiveness for me, it’s there for everyone, including those who have been ensnared by sexual sins such as homosexuality.

It is remarkably hypocritical how the Christian community can open its arms to a struggling alcoholic or drug addict, but condemn and hammer with no opportunity of restoration or healing a sex offender. In dealing with multiple sex offenders, Jesus was compassionate and forgiving. He was also truthful with them. He called their sin, “sin.” But he also offered them forgiveness and a way out of their sin.

In closing, I would like to recommend a short book, from which I’m about to read. It is entitled *Is God Anti-gay?*, by Sam Allberry, www.thegoodbook.com. Sam writes about his own struggle with same sex attraction, which he became aware of upon graduating from high school. He writes:

I had always been someone who formed close friendships, but I was now beginning to realize there was something a bit more than that going on. Though I’d had a couple of girlfriends, I’d never felt the same kind of bond as I had with one or two of my close male friends. As the long summer began and there was less going on to distract me, the truth began to bite. The words began to form in my mind: I think I’m gay. This was not a welcome development. I wanted to be like everyone else, and to be into what everyone else was into. I wanted to

have feelings for girls like my friends had. And yet, instead of having feelings for girls with my friends, I was finding myself having feelings for my friends. [p. 7-8]

Sam goes on to write sensitively about his own struggles and how Jesus drew him to Himself, and how the gospel showed him the way through his struggles with same sex attraction to find life--a normal married life with kids. Today, God is using him to warmly embrace others who are confused about their sexuality and are trying to figure out life.

If you know someone who is quietly trying to work through thoughts about their sexuality, this is a great little book. He asks and answers well, with words of compassion and understanding, many of the questions I have been asked down through the years.

As we close, let's remember Jesus' promise: "**I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly.**" God doesn't want to restrict anything from our lives that would keep us from enjoying the most abundant life possible. But because He loves us, He will stir us away from that which is a lie and harmful to our well-being.