

The Revelation of the Righteousness of God's Wrath: A Holy God in the Hands of Sinful Man

(Part 3)

Romans 1:21-32

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Scripture

“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 creeping things. 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 about God for a lie and worshiped and served 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."

Have you ever wished in your mind that someone would just leave you alone? Have you ever had someone in your life that just went out of their way trying to get you to know who they were? They just would not quit; they would go on and on until it gets to the point of utter frustration. Have you ever let your lips reveal what you were thinking? When it was obvious they would not quit, you finally said, "Just leave me alone!" And then they did.

God's Revelation

I believe this is what is happening in Romans chapter 1. God is a God who wants to be known. Therefore, everywhere man looked, God was there. It was as if God was screaming, "Know me, know me, know me!" Finally, man came to the point to express what he was thinking. "God, why don't just leave me alone?" And God did. He left man alone and the world has never been the same. When we look at verses 18-32, there are three things I would like for us to understand.

1. God's reveals Himself through nature or creation.

It is evident that creation reveals the glory of God. It is clear that God is a God who wants to be known, and He can be through creation. These verses do not teach a natural theology, but a natural or general revelation. There is enough light in natural revelation to condemn man for his sin, but there is not enough light to bring sinful man to salvation. However, there is enough light to hold man accountable for his sin. I firmly believe in natural revelation. I believe it is clearly taught in Scripture, but I do not believe in natural theology. Natural theology teaches that there is enough light in creation for man to have an intimate, saving relationship with God. Scripture does not teach that.

2. The problem was with fallen man.

Now, the problem is not with revelation, just as the problem was not with the Law. Verses 21-23 will teach about man's response to the light that God has given him. Man's response was not good. Verse 21 says:

"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."

Let's notice what Scripture says, *"Although they knew God."* God is not pouring His wrath on people who do not know Him. He is pouring His wrath out on people who know there is a God. They know His eternal power and His divine nature. They know He is sovereign and omnipotent.

3. God expects a proper response.

When God steps into people's lives and reveals Himself to them, He expects a response, a proper response. Scripture will teach that when God stepped into mankind's life and reveals Himself through nature, man did not honor or give thanks to God, which implies that was the response that God wanted. He wanted man to honor and be thankful to Him. He wanted honor as a God who created all for us to enjoy, but man did not, he would not. He would not thank God for being his creator.

This word, *"honor"*, is sometimes translated in English by the word "glory." It is where we get our English word **orthodox**. To be orthodox means "to have a right, straight, or clear opinion." In other words, when you honor and glorify God, you have a right, or straight, or clear opinion of Him. From this thought, we get our English word and thought process of **worship**. To honor God, to think clearly about God, to have a right opinion of God, leads a person to worship. But our English word, **worship**, comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word that literally means "worth-ship." When you glorify and honor God, you give to Him what He is worth. That is what God wants

from His creation. He wants His creation to worship Him, to think right about Him, to praise Him, and to be thankful for Him! Can you imagine God revealing Himself to man and man rejecting to honor Him, and being thankful for Him?

- **Foolish Hearts**

The Bible says that when man made this wrong choice "*they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.*" This word, "*futile*", means "to be vain, to be empty." In the Greek language, it literally means "to be ineffective." The word for "*thinking*" in this verse is where we get our words "imagination and speculations." So then man became empty in his speculation, in his thinking, and in his mind, and his foolish heart became darkened. In the biblical world, the word, "*hearts*", did not mean the seat of affections and emotions as it does in English society. In Greek and Roman society, it was literally known as the moral compass of a man. It was his will, or his seat of discernment. It was sometimes used in Scripture to refer to the whole of man's inner being; the conclusion, the will of his thinking and emotional process when he came to a place to make that moral decision. But, man's foolish heart became darkened. In other words, when man rejected to respond properly to God, in his innerness, the light went out. Man will replace revelation with reasoning. He will claim to be wise, but he will become foolish.

- **Man Claiming Wisdom**

This word, "*wise*", is where we get our word "philosophy." Supposedly, some of the wisest people in our universities teach in the Philosophy department. To be honest, in college and seminary, I did not like philosophy. I struggle with it. The basis of philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom; wisdom being man's reasoning about the purpose of life. Have you noticed philosophers will have an opinion about the origin of life? The reason is because you cannot understand the purpose of life until you understand the origin of life. The purpose is tied to the origin. Man replaced what God has revealed to be true about Himself with what man

thinks or wishes is true about God. In our universities, we no longer have theology departments, but philosophical departments. The reason is because, as a society, we have rejected what God has revealed to be true about Him and replaced it with speculation and reasoning. Men, claiming to be philosophical and wise, became fools.

This is not going to be popular, but I must tell you this word that is translated as "*fools*" is where we get our English word "moron." When I was younger and someone called you a moron, it was a fighting word. That was a derogatory word, a horrific word, a word that you just did not get called. When it was used, it was usually applied to you when you did something really foolish. At that moment, it had nothing to do with your intellect, but everything to do with your morals. Your decision was not based on your aptitude or your intellect; it was usually based on a false moral. It is not a good term, it means you are lacking. Scripture says man thought he was philosophical and wise, and God says he became a moron! The people referred to in these verses are not lacking intellectually, they are lacking morally. The Word of God says:

"The fool has said there is no God."

- **Man Created His Own God**

Scripture says that when God began to deal with man through the light of revelation of Himself in creation, man took that revelation and the glory of the incorruptible God, and he traded it for an image resembling man, birds, animals, and reptiles. I try to be careful when I quote science because I do not have a scientific background. But I believe that scientists teach in the religious evolution of man, that he started with worshipping sticks and stones, evolved to polytheism, then to monotheism, and ultimately to atheism. That is the place where he did not even need God. That is not what the Bible teaches, and archaeology agrees with Scripture. Man did not start out worshipping sticks and stones. He knew right off the bat that there was one God. He did not evolve to the belief of one God, it was revealed to him, and he devolved to sticks and stones. There are people in

the Church today who want to believe the man on the deserted island has never known there was a God. He wanted to know God, so in his attempt to know God, he made a god and just did the best he could. What man really needs is just more information. But man has enough information! There is already enough light in creation for him to know he should not be doing what he is doing. Man wants to replace the God he knows with the god he wants. So he makes man his god, and he makes creation his god. Can you imagine what an insult this was to the God of Heaven? The Bible teaches that God created man in His image, and His creation created his own god in man's image. This is an insult to a holy God. Man did not like God, and he did not want to know God, so he made his own god. At first, he started out by just deifying man. He did not start with insects and snakes and then work up to the land animals, the birds, and then man. He first made them after man, then birds, then animals, and then reptiles. Man does not evolve, man devolves!

If I could create my own god I would not have to worry about what he wanted me to do, he would be concerned about what I wanted to do. You see, man wants a convenient god, a god that he can carry around with him in his pocket. If I can carry my god around, then I can go do anything I want to do and call on him to bail me out when I get into trouble. That is not God. My God's priorities are not where I want to go, it is where He is. He has not agreed to tag along with me. I have the promise that as long as I am with Him, He will always be with me. If I am serving the true God, I want to know where He will be and what He will be involved in. I get in on where He is, or what He is doing. I do not go and do anything I want, and then ask Him to go where I am. There is only one God, and His name is Yahweh, "I am who I am." He has revealed Himself to us in His Son Jesus Christ. The true God is the Father of the Lord Jesus, and there are no others. All others are gods.

When I go to a Chinese restaurant I cannot help but notice they have their god Buddha right there in the restaurant. I do not mean to be disrespectful, but if I am going to create a god after man, I am not going

to create one that looks like Buddha! The last thing I want to do is to grow up and look like Buddha! Whether it is Buddhism, or Hinduism, or Muslim, or Agnosticism, or Atheism, they all fall under the category of figments of your imagination. You either serve Yahweh, or you serve a figment. They are all a figment of your philosophical speculation, and it will always be a god that you want him to be, never the God revealed in Scripture.

God Gave Them Up

Verse 24 says "*therefore*." It means that it is ok to be upset about this because God was upset about it. It is telling us that God's wrath was righteous. What God was going to do was the right thing since man had rejected the knowledge he had. Because of what man had done, "*Therefore God gave them up*." Some translations say, "*turned them over*." My commentaries say this is a judicial term. It literally meant all of the evidence had been given; the judge weighed it, pronounced the party guilty, and then sentenced them properly. God did not act out of emotion and make an emotional response to man's sin; He made a judicial response to man's sin, and He gave them up. It is one thing when a guy gives up on God, but it is another thing when God gives up on man. It is one thing for God to turn an individual loose, but it is another thing when God turns a society loose. This is one of the most horrific passages in Scripture. If you think the doctrine of eternal separation from God in the future is horrible, let me equally lay right alongside it the present outpouring of God's wrath, at this very moment, on man who has rejected the light he has been given. God abandons man. God allows man to be as sinful as he wants to be.

- **To Sin**

Several years ago there was a group of people that I was involved with who theologically wanted to talk about how man would become more sinful if God was not restraining man. The restrain of God is off. God is not preventing man from being more sinful, He is allowing sinful man to be as sinful as he wants to be. The grace of God has been removed. The restraining activity of God, which had labored with man to keep him from

being as sinful as he could be, has now turned man loose. What is sad is that we live in a society where some take that as a symbol that there must not be a God. If I can do whatever I want and there not be a consequence, then there must not be a God. No...that is a sign there is a God.

What is even more tragic is the group that says the reason God is letting me do what I want is because He is a God of love. He understands my nature and who I am, so He lets me do what I want. No, you are being allowed to do what you want because God is a God of wrath, as well as love. He is a God of justice, as well as grace and mercy.

- **To Impurity**

He gave them up to "*the lust of their hearts to impurity.*" We are back to the heart. We know these people are dark in their heart. They are foolish, they are morons. The lust of their hearts is impurity. The word, "*impurity*", is translated differently in our English versions of the Bible, but basically this is where we get our English word "pornography." God saw the heart of man and knew that he wanted to commit sexual sin against the mandate of God to be sexually holy in marriage. Man dishonored his body. I find poetic justice here. God revealed Himself to man and man would not honor God. So if you do not honor God, you dishonor God. Man, by making these false images, dishonored God with idolatry. Idolatry leads to immorality. The people who dishonored God dishonored their bodies. Paul would teach the Corinthian church that when you (sexually) sin outside of marriage, you are sinning against your body.

When I was a kid they talked about venereal diseases, primarily syphilis and gonorrhea. I saw some horrible pictures and statistics about what happens when a person gives into fleshly lusts and dishonors his body, and it has a devastating effect on the body. I do not believe venereal disease is even used in our terminology today. We have transformed it to STD's. What heterosexual people are doing to their bodies is epidemic. Wilt Chamberlin can brag about his partners sexually numbering in the thousands. Magic Johnson can say he had lost count of his sexual partners

as he traveled around the nation. It is the wrath of God! The reason is because:

"They exchange the truth about God for a lie, and they have worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever amen!"

Paul cannot even write about God in this horrible passage without saying He is to be blessed forever amen, even in the midst of Him pouring out His wrath upon mankind.

- **To Dishonorable Passions**

We live in a society that says the Church should not be angry with sin. The Church had better be angry with sin because God is angry with sin! They exchanged the truth of who God really is for a lie, they exchanged Yahweh for a figment. There are serious consequences to a person when they reject the light they have been given. Verse 26 says:

"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 the women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for the error."

It is one thing for God to turn man over to the lust of his heart that is dark, but then He even turned man over to dishonorable passions. In verse 24, the Bible talks about sins that are excessive. But these sins in verse 26 and 27 are unnatural. These are sins that we should not even be thinking of, much less committing. He starts with the women. There is a two-fold thought as to why he starts with the women:

1. Eve sinned first.
2. Women are usually the last frontier against immorality.

God has designed the woman to be the nurturer, the caregiver. The woman usually puts her children and husband first, and puts herself last.

So when we get to the point where women are putting themselves first and going against what is natural, you know we are in trouble.

A couple of years ago, one of the big things on the Murray State University campus was ladies making videos of themselves with other ladies and showing it to the guys, or two ladies being together in an intimate, sexual way at a party and men were watching. Men leaving the natural relation they have with a woman for another man, "*consumed with passion*."

"*Consumed*" means to be at the place where you are burning up! God has turned people over to a point that their passions consume them, and they do what is unnatural. God has ordained that if you live singly, you live a life without sex. And if you live in marriage, you live a life with sex, but only with your spouse. That is the only natural thing. It is unnatural when a lady wants a lady and a male wants a male.

Religiously, the gay community is preaching a God of love, and that He understands. They fail to take into account that the very reason they are doing what they are doing is because He is a God of wrath. I believe He is a God of love. I believe the moment a person repents of that lifestyle and puts their faith and trust in Jesus, God will save them and forgive them and wash them white as snow!

John McArthur was on the Larry King Live show with two homosexuals. He said that he believes that homosexuality is next to beastuality. It made one of the homosexuals mad. He confronted John, and John showed him Leviticus, and Romans, and 1 Corinthians, and when he finished, the man said, "You are so caught up in the words of the Bible that you have missed its message." Their message is that He is a God of only love. That is not God; that is a figment of the mind of the gay community because they do not want to know the true God.

- **To a Debased Mind**

The Bible says in verse 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."

They would not acknowledge God in His deity and sovereignty over their lives and bow down and be thankful to Him. So He not only turned them over to the lust of their hearts and their consuming passions, He then turned them over to a debased, or depraved mind.

This word, "*debased*", literally means "unable to make a right, moral choice." It was used in the coin industry. They would mint a coin and test it. Some were approved and put into circulation, and the ones that weren't were not put into circulation. It meant to be unapproved, not to be fit. God has tested the minds, He has tested the philosophical people, and He found it lacking. He has turned people over to their depraved mind, a mind that can no longer think right about God. The result is in verse 29-31:

"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."

Are those verses not an indictment of our society? God is pouring out His wrath on man and He is allowing him to be as sinful as he wants to be!

God's Righteous Decree

God is righteous in doing this as we see in verse 32:

"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."

We will find out later in Romans that those who do not have special revelation have the law written on their hearts and their conscience. Do not misunderstand. There is no person anywhere who does not know God! The word, "*approval*", in verse 32 means "to applaud." God is righteous to pour out His wrath on a society that not only practices sin, but entertains itself with sin. If there is one society on earth who is entertaining itself with sin, it is the American culture. If you let Hollywood entertain you, there will not be a married couple. But if there is one, every choice they make will be wrong. The rebellious kids and the affair will always be right, and the one couple that does right on TV is the gay couple. How dare you and I laugh at Ellen! How dare we watch Will and Grace! Is it possible that the nation was founded as a nation under God has been turned over to do whatever they want to do? And we still sing God has blessed America, when in reality, He may be at this very moment condemning our society by allowing it to be as sinful as it wants to be! Jesus said when He came into the world that men did not love Him because He came as light, and men love darkness. When you are in darkness and you come to the light, the light exposes your sin. Let us be light in a world of darkness.