

Guilty
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Romans 1:18-32

Opening: Several weeks ago I quoted A.W. Tozer: “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”ⁱ Unless they study scripture, people tend to create God in the image they desire. **How do those people “imagine” God? How do they imagine His personality?**

Have you ever heard of the “Jefferson Bible?” In his retirement, Thomas Jefferson took copies of the King James Bible and cut out (using a razor) passages of the gospels that he found meaningful and pasted them into another book. He entitled it “The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth” and never intended that the book be published. He said it was for his own reading and reflection. Here’s the problem, He kept what he considered the helpful parts of Jesus’ life but rejected anything miraculous. The book ends as the stone is rolled over entry to the tomb. [You can view the book online at the Smithsonian’s website <https://americanhistory.si.edu/JeffersonBible/history/> .]

Jefferson claimed to be a Christian but he refused to believe in the deity of Christ. He wanted to reflect on the virtues of Jesus but not the truth of scripture.

As long as we’ve had the scriptures we’ve had passages that some people would rather ignore. The second half of Romans chapter one is one of those passages. It’s a heavy passage with hard truth about God’s wrath against ungodliness. It describes the penalty for those who suppress and twist the truth about God. In today’s politically correct world, part of this passage is used to paint followers of Christ as narrow-minded bigots. [Aren’t you glad you came to Sunday School?]

The Big Idea of this lesson is simple: Ignoring God leads to destruction.

- Though God is patient and longsuffering, if someone repeatedly and rebelliously rejects Him, God will eventually “turn them over” to their sin and ultimately to eternal destruction.
- There is some good news though. It doesn’t have to be that way thanks to what Jesus did for all mankind on the cross.
- Let’s go through these verses asking God to help us see this truth clearly.

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

- This verse says God’s wrath is against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of those who suppress the truth.
- Some struggle to reconcile that God is both a loving Heavenly Father AND a God of justice and wrath. It’s really not so hard to grasp. How could God be perfectly holy if He is “soft on sin?”
- Put it in human terms: **What kinds of children come from a home with permissive parents who are all love and no rules?** Love = rules!
- Chuck Swindoll: *“A God of love must hate anything that harms those He loves. A God of love must take action to protect the innocent against the malicious. A God of love must mean business when He declares a certain action “off-limits.” After all, a law without consequences is no law at all.”ⁱⁱ*
- Put simply, God hates sin. In His holiness He cannot tolerate sin. Because of Adam and Eve’s sin we are all born as sinners in need of a Savior.
- **Why would someone “suppress” the truth about God’s view of sin?**
- Wiersbe: *“Men knew the truth about God, but they did not allow this truth to work in their lives. They suppressed it in order that they might live their own lives and not be convicted by God’s truth.”ⁱⁱⁱ*
- In simple terms, the truth of God makes me feel guilty about my sin.
- If someone doesn’t want to deal with the wrath of a holy God over our sin, his or her first argument is that God doesn’t exist. Paul addressed this:

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.

- Paul begins by stating that human beings know there is a Creator God because He has revealed His “power and divine nature” in creation.
- People often ask, “How can a loving God send people to hell?” One commentator put it this way, “The entire question is wrong. A better wording is “If God is love, then why do some people go to hell? People have been given enough truth to know and surrender to God, but they refuse it.”^{iv}
- “C. S. Lewis summarizes this truth in his classic work, *The Great Divorce*: “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in Hell, choose it.”^v
- People may claim He doesn’t exist but creation confirms in their hearts He’s there. Thus, humanity began by knowing God is real and powerful.

²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools,

- If in our hearts we know there is a holy God who created everything **why wouldn’t we honor Him as God and give Him thanks? In Genesis 3:5 what was the real temptation Satan dangled in front of Eve?**
- If you want to understand fallen humanity just look at a toddler in the “terrible twos.” We were born wanting things our way; to be “God.”
- Verses 21 & 22: **What happens to a heart and mind that rejects God?**

- If the true God makes me feel bad about my sin (conviction) then I'll just create my OWN god.

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

- Those silly, ancient pagans! They started worshipping the sun and rain, fertility, even images of birds, animals, and insects.
- They worshipped things God made instead of God himself.
- It's a good thing we're more enlightened than they were! Are we?
- Humans were created to worship. We all worship something or someone.
- An idol is anything that replaces the one true God. They had blocks of wood; people today have other idols that come before God.
- Now we get to the real point. What happens when someone continuously, rebelliously, rejects God?
- God's patience is not because He is soft on sin, it's to give us time to repent and acknowledge Christ as Savior and Lord (Romans 2:4.)
- Though God is patient and longsuffering, there is a point where His patience runs out.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

- "God gave them up." As in handing over a prisoner to his sentence.
- They rejected God so he abandoned them.
- Swindoll: *"Theologians call this "judicial abandonment," which some have described in one of two ways. Some see judicial abandonment as a passive forsaking of humanity to the consequences of their evil intentions. In other words, in response to their straining against the leash, God simply releases His grip and allows humanity to run headlong into sin and its consequences, thus allowing them to consummate their*

lusts. But this is judicial abandonment only in part. There is nothing passive about God's "giving over" humanity to sin."^{vi}

- Steven Lawson compares this to untying a boat from the dock and letting it drift. If someone purposely and continually rejects God, God doesn't just untie the boat, He is "shoving the boat" downstream sending them away from Him. Lawson says, there comes a time when someone has been "running stop signs so long with God...God says "fine, I'll turn you over in judgment."^{vii} What does that look like?

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

- Verses 26 and 27 are two of those verses that cause people to accuse Christians of being bigots. We could spend a whole series of lessons on those two verses. I'm not going to spend much time here, not because I'm afraid but because it's not the point of this lesson.
- There are many rebuttals to those verses. Some argue those verses were about sexual abuse and don't apply in a committed same-sex relationship.
- Some reject verses like this by saying Jesus never spoke against same-sex relationships. What DID Jesus say about God ordained sexual relationships? In Matthew 19:4-6: Jesus said, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?"^{viii}
- My personal view is that scripture is clear that God created sex to be between a man and a woman in a monogamous marital relationship.
- I believe followers of Christ should respond to this topic with hearts of love for people and not clinched fists for a fight. As my friend Steve Brown said once, "I'm not God or their mother."

Pray for them, show them the love of Christ, don't compromise the truth, but don't appoint yourself their judge.

- We could unpack this for days and weeks. I'm moving on not out of fear but because it's beyond the scope of this lesson.
- The last five verses of this chapter describe the downward spiral of those who shake their fist in God's face. They are also a good description of what we see and hear in our society today:

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.

Other thoughts?

So, What's the Takeaway?

- What's the point? Why did Paul include this in his letter and especially at the very beginning? What was his purpose in sharing these "heavy" truths about God's wrath toward ungodliness?
- These verses aren't just about rebellion or rejection; they're about repentance (for our sin,) redemption (paid for by Christ on the cross) and reconciliation (with God.)
- For the unsaved they are a call to repent and trust in Christ.
- For the saved it's a call to point people toward Jesus and to daily stay "close and clean" ourselves.
- Paul "tied this up with a bow" later in Romans 6:23 (ESV)
- ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ⁱ The Knowledge of the Holy - A.W. Tozer

ⁱⁱ Swindoll, Charles R.. Insights on Romans (Swindoll's New Testament Insights) (p. 19). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱⁱWiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 518). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^{iv} <https://www.gotquestions.org/loving-God-send-someone-hell.html>

^v ibid

^{vi} Swindoll, Charles R.. Insights on Romans (Swindoll's New Testament Insights) (p. 25). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

^{vii} <http://www.onepassionministries.org/the-mens-bible-study/2017/2/2/march-8-romans>

^{viii} *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Mt 19:4–5). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.