

GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

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Bible Text: Romans 1:24-32
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Well, if you're visiting tonight, we are working through the book of Romans, and we come tonight to the last half of Romans chapter 1. So I invite you to turn to Romans chapter 1 and we'll be looking at verses 16, actually, the text tonight is verses 24 through 32. I'll back up again so we have the full context and read at verse 16 of Romans 1, found on page 1,116 in the Bibles that are in front of you. Let's give our attention tonight to the word of the Lord.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." 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. 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.

Now our text,

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. 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. 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.

There we'll end tonight on the reading of God's word.

Well, one of the challenging aspects, I think, and sad aspects of modern Christianity is that very few people, if you ask them, seem to understand, if you ask the basic question of Christianity, what are we saved from, they can't give an answer. Part of that, as I have said, is that Christianity has, by and large, become so therapeutic in its approach to its message that most people approach the message of Christianity as if God just simply exists solely in the sky to fix all of our problems and to dish out help for us in whatever way we need it; he just sits in the heaven and beams down upon us bolts of help, I guess, to deliver us from whatever ailment that we have in life. There's been a therapeutic approach to Christianity where it's just been therapy and that has been detrimental for people understanding what the gravity of the problem is and why we need a gospel, a good news for us, a really good news. This has caused us to misdiagnose our problem in this life, and that affects the cure that we need. In other words, if you misdiagnose it, the cure is only as radical as the disease itself, the diagnosis that we receive. That's why Romans 1 is helpful tonight. That's why Romans 1 is a shocking passage in our day, a shocking passage and one that deals with heavy realities about the human heart, but it's describing things in detail for us so that we would ultimately understand what we need to be saved from, what deliverance is, what gospel is. Gospel means good news. That's why this is so important tonight. What do we need to be saved from? And the basic message of Christianity is we need to be saved from the wrath of God because of our sin. That's the basic message of Christianity that has always been taught and always been embraced. It's an amazing truth of Christianity that we are saved by God, from God, by God himself.

Well, tonight we have Paul describing the punishment of God for the willful rebellion of mankind against him, that's what Romans 1 is describing, and the shocking revelation of what we hear a little bit about today is the problem of God's wrath, his justice, as we've been considering, and where it can go, and why we need deliverance immediately, because we see the path of sin tonight. We see the trajectory of sin tonight. We see the cycle of sin in people's lives, and where it ends up, and how God is responding to that. So vitally important for everyone is Romans chapter 1 and the main point here tonight, the main point that Paul is addressing is, and it's the exact point of our Heidelberg Catechism, that God is indeed a just God and that God indeed is terribly angry about our rebellion, our sin. And that payment has to be made. And wrath is being revealed from heaven because of this. That's an important message we began to look at last time. When we think of the wrath of God, we think of something that only, if we accept that, right, most

people really struggle with that principle, the Scriptures teach it everywhere, the just judgment of God, that's something that happens on judgment day. That is not what Romans 1 is explaining tonight. Romans 1 is explaining to us that the just judgment of God begins in this life, that there is punishment now and in eternity. And that's why there's such an urgency to the message of the Christian gospel. That's why there's such urgency to the good news that we're taking out to the nations. That's why we want everyone to believe this news, because we don't want anyone to face this. And I want to keep in front of us, I want to keep that truth in front of us that Paul has been explaining so far in this book when he introduced himself to the Romans, this church in Rome, that his great goal was to come to them and to preach the gospel to them. That's the heart of Christian ministry. The heart of Christian ministry is not therapy. It's not to fix every single problem in this life, that's what the resurrection will fix. The heart of Christianity is the good news of Jesus Christ for you to deliver you from all your sins and Paul was eager to preach that. Paul kept that front and center amidst all the pressures in this life.

Why is that so necessary? Because he said in verse 16 and 17, "in it," in the gospel, "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" So this gospel has to be preached. This gospel has to go out. This is what the church has been commissioned to do and to give to deliver people from their sins and set them free in the truth. But there is something provided for fallen humanity and that is in the gospel, a beautiful and a complete and a perfect righteousness that meets the divine standard of God's holiness, and that is why we declare people need to be right with him, and the good news of Romans is there's a way. The book's aim is to explain the doctrine of justification by faith alone. It's pastoral. He wants everyone here tonight to understand that you can be right with God and that you can know God's love, anticipating Romans 8:1, "There is, therefore, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Now, why do we need that gospel? Well, that's what Romans 1 is helping us to understand. We need this gospel because the wrath of God is a very serious problem because of sin and Romans is helping us now understand that, that it is presently, in the present, being revealed. And no one can deny this. What I'm about to show you, what we're about to look at, can be testified, especially in our times, by all of us, as we've seen the very things that are described here, 2,000 years ago, under inspiration of the Spirit, playing directly out in our society. This is important tonight. Paul looks at the Gentile world of unbelievers and what he sees is a whole world in rebellion against God. The summary is this of Romans 1 tonight and what we're looking at: God at times has removed his restraint upon the sinful actions of people and their consequences take the shape that they do. He'll explain that. And he has left them in their course of their rejection to let it take its shape and that's why we have to consider carefully and importantly why the gospel is so needed. This is important because biblical teaching on this, we think of the doctrine of reprobation as our Canons say, that God eternally determined to leave others in the misery of sin, not giving them faith in conversion, but letting their sin work out their own ruin. I think this is important to say upfront before we look at this tonight, that this is where Reform theology has been deeply criticized as being maybe fatalistic or deterministic in the wrong way, as if God just decreed all of this, this wickedness, and there's nothing that can be done about it.

Well, I want you to notice Romans 1 speaks of this mystery in a very important way tonight. The exercising of wrath is described in Romans 1 as a response, as the Heidelberg says, to the willful hatred of God himself. I want to make sure we understand this. It's not that God is simply giving people over to things they don't want. I made this point last time. God is not simply giving people over to things they don't want. There's an important verse in James that explains the cycle of sin. We looked at it last time. "Let no man say when he's tempted, I'm tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does he tempt any man, but every man is tempted when he's drawn away of his own lust and enticed, then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin and sin," old translation, "when it's finished, it brings forth death." Sin runs a course in people's lives. Sin moves in people's lives and when it runs its full course, the "in consequence" of that is death.

Now, we looked at last time the three reasons that God has revealed his wrath from heaven. First, what he said in the previous verses is, they suppress the truth in unrighteousness. They literally hold down the truth. They push it down and push it away. The truth that is revealed in creation we looked at last time. I mean, how can we not look out and see the creation, that's why I keep referencing the solar eclipse. That was an amazing event. People went to study it. And Romans 1 says that reveals the eternal power and the Godhead so that everyone's without excuse. When we look at this masterful theater that's all around us, everyone should see there's a God. This didn't bang together. That's craziness. The second reason is conscience. God put a conscience on the human heart and Paul says, first reason, they willfully push that down. They suppress those truths and that's what he's explaining to us as one of the very first reasons. The second in verse 21 was that they, after seeing all this, their conscience became seared. They refused to glorify God and worship him as God. So they didn't worship him at all. They actually ended up worshiping the creation. And then the third reason was, nor were they thankful. Every day you get up, it's a gift. Do you realize that? Every breath you take. You don't deserve to be here. I don't deserve to be here. The movements we have in our bodies, everything we enjoy, it's all a gift. And Paul says the course of people in this life is they push away all that truth, they suppress it, they end up worshiping everything else other than God, and they refuse to acknowledge him and give him thanks.

So Paul provided the three reasons there for the revelation of wrath in this life and he's explaining what the revelation of God's righteous judgment begins to look like in this life, and how God has responded to this. His wrath is not a fly-off-the-handle kind of thing. It's not just an emotion as we think. It is wrath, a word that describes it being as something that grows ripe over time. So beginning at verse 24 tonight, where we pick up, he says three times God gave them over, God handed them over to what they wanted. It's very important. Notice the first one there in verse 24, "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves." So what we have described here is God's response to those three things that were just mentioned and part of it is a response of God, a judgment of God because of that rebellion. God himself gave them over. He gave them up. God on his part in the exercising of wrath, the truth that's being said here is that he can turn people over to the

very things that they want and he doesn't make and doesn't do and doesn't give a positive action to stop what they want so that the sinner goes headlong and in full pursuit of the rebellion and the sin. The consequences that follow is what James outlines in the cycle of sin.

The fact is, and we looked at it last time, one of the amazing works of God in this life is that he restrains evil all the time. I don't think we could hardly function in this life if God didn't restrain evil. He restrains this as we looked at by what we believe about common grace, that he holds back sin and makes life possible. All he has to do is lift his hand, as we looked at last time, and it's like lifting hell's lid, all this stuff comes out that we never knew we were even capable of. You find this throughout the Scriptures. If God did not keep in check fallen humanity, the world would utterly crumble in consequences of its actions, but at some point known to God, he gives people over by letting them do exactly what they want to do and they go headlong into it.

You know, it was really, I thought sad this week, you know, the OJ Simpson thing. Somebody raised, "I was surprised you didn't mention that this morning," and I said, "Well, I'll work it in tonight." It's a sad story. You know, God knows the truth of that matter and it was amazing how many people celebrated the death of that man. And it was Bruce Jenner who said, "Good riddance," and couldn't see that himself, he himself, is in the very same trajectory. He's on the very same path. What Paul wants us to think about is this: everyone in this life is in a cycle of sin. And think about what we looked at in Heidelberg tonight, we are accumulating debt because of sin and that people choose to bring their own death in that, but that this wrath can be exercised when God turns them over to it.

Let me come back to Jonah for a minute since I mentioned him this morning. It's not that we don't try this. This is somewhat stunning when you think about Jonah. Jonah was a preacher. Jonah was called to go to Nineveh. God was exercising his mercy on wicked Nineveh, baby-aborting Nineveh. God gave the command. If you study the life of Jonah in the first part of Jonah, Jonah first runs the other way. The book begins to describe a downward spiral of Jonah. Four times the text says Jonah went down, went down, went down, and by the end of his spiral into sin and rebellion against God, his life is described as being at the bottom of the ocean, what he calls the bars of Sheol around him. He was at the bottom of the ocean. That was the path Jonah chose. Farthest point from God, he could end up on earth was right there at the bottom of the ocean. I think it's important to say the amazing truth is that God wasn't giving Jonah over to his sin, was he? No, he didn't do that. God lovingly chastised his child and he brought that son back.

That's an amazing truth. That's the prodigal son. I want to be careful here pastorally in what I'm about to go through. I know there are brothers and sisters tonight, and I know that any of us are but a step away from running from God, prone to wander, prone to leave the God that I love. There are some who struggle here with great issues of lust, fighting sexual temptation, and sometimes you feel you're given to those temptations, and then you fall into sin. If you're a believer in that struggle, you are in that struggle. That's the point. Romans 1 is not talking tonight about a sensitive Christian who struggles

against these things as if there's no hope for him. There is a crucial difference between living in the struggle against sin, fighting your sin, battling your sin, sometimes falling down and God pulling you back up like Jonah, than living in sin with a seared conscience and fighting against God to the point of saying, "I don't care." That's different. And even in that scenario, God may deliver. God has the power to deliver. We'll come back to that. The sensitive conscience hates sin. The sensitive Christian fights against sin. The sensitive Christians always having a war within in this life until he's finally, finally delivered. That's the death benefit. You constantly come back to the Lord with a broken heart. You may come back 70 times seven with the same sin. God gives deliverance and his Holy Spirit has the power to shatter that dominion. He does, even though it's presence remains.

That's not, that's not Romans 1. I want to make really clear. That's not Romans 1. Romans 1 is describing his wrath when he turns somebody over and gives them over to it. When he does that, the path is also straight down and Paul describes the development of that. But I want to make sure you understand as he describes this, he's not describing it as if there's no hope. That's why the power of the gospel is mentioned in verse 16, to deliver, to save, but people have to be faced with, "Don't play with sin. Don't rebel against God. Don't fight him because sin is no game. Rebellion is no game." And Paul wants us to think about that. Here's what can happen. In verse 24, in response to those three things, number one, "God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves." Notice the "therefore," therefore God did this, therefore was in response to something. Why did God do this? Because verse 22, "professing to be wise, they became fools and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, birds, and four-footed animals and creeping things." He says it again, "they worshiped and serve the creature rather than the Creator who is forever blessed." I want you to notice an important connection there. The consequence, God's response to this was, God gave people over to whatever lusts filled their heart, and we know what are the most powerful lusts in people's heart, it was because, notice here, the refusal of the creation, conscience, and their idolatry.

There's a crucial connection here to idolatry that's important. It's not always the case. I want to make clear, but notice this is important that he gives people over. Notice the path often begins with idolatry because they refuse to glorify him. They refuse to acknowledge him. These were the two twin sins in Israel's history, they were idolatry and they were sexual morality. In fact, they're the two sins that are mentioned in the New Testament that the Bible says don't hang around and try to fight. You just run the other way as fast as you can. When you find this giving over and sexual immorality beginning to reign, you find idolatry and a rejection of God often comes with it, and so notice here that they are given over to serve, to worship in that and to serve the lusts of their sinful hearts. That's the searing of conscience that begins. When God says he gave them over, they went headlong into it, something that they were choosing to do. A seared conscience, and you know the path, you know, the path starts, I think 1 John describes this path really powerfully when he says, "If you say you have no sin, you deceive yourselves. If you say you have no sin right now, you're deceiving yourself. And if you say I've never sinned." It's like talking to someone when they're living in sin and they first are a little softer and

then it grows harder and harder to the point of, "I'm not sinning, don't talk to me about it anymore." It's a path. So notice what he's describing here, a seared conscience and all of the immoralities that then begin to follow that. Paul's saying, "You know what this is." And this is important. This is where we're uncomfortable today. What we're seeing happen in society is a revelation of God's wrath.

This is just the tip of the iceberg in the first one. I talked about progression. There's a progression here you can follow with Paul. The lusts reign. They're given over to the lust. They're serving in the lust. They're refusing God. They're worshiping other things. From basic sexual immorality, it moves in verse 26, therefore, notice the chain, for this reason, he gave them up to vile passions, vile, shameful passions. These are now the passions that are against nature. "Likewise, the men leaving the natural use of women burned in lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful and receiving in themselves the penalty of the error which was due." God turns them over to vile passions and then he says, for this reason, he turned them over to that which is against nature. So you have sort of basic sense to being a fallen creature of adultery and morality or whatever and then you have, verse 24, sins that then move to being against nature.

It goes further. Notice that he's moving down the line here. And here's something interesting to think about. Well, I'll come back to this thought, that society itself has pushed the line of morality further and further back. Think of what was tolerated years ago, or what was the great sin that nobody ever would have committed and would have been the great sin in society. It would have been adultery. Whoever talks about that anymore? Or fornication, sex outside of marriage? Now we've pushed the line further back and the line keeps going further back. Paul describes that here, men inflamed with lust. That's sodomy. You think of sodomy, the term from where we get Sodom and Gomorrah, it's always been a vice heavily condemned in the Bible, and I know we live in a day when there are those who have said that the Bible never addresses the issue of homosexuality. That is exactly what's being described here. The sins that were normal 10 years ago. You know, I looked back on my notes, think about this. I looked back on my notes from years ago when I first preached this years ago and I said this, "I believe that there will be a terrible battle in the very near future where governments will change these things and attempt to silence anyone who speaks out against it." When I said that, that was not so. Think about that. The second revelation of God's wrath has now been legalized and written into law. The second revelation of God's wrath has been legalized and written into law.

Now I agree, we can't single out this sin as the great unpardonable sin. I know that that's the great charge and all sin is indeed sin, but I don't think we can miss what the Lord is telling us here is that there is an escalation into sin, and it's not just an evidence of God's wrath, but that people who are practicing it, what we're seeing is they're moving further and further down into the progression in the cycle of sin that leads into death. That's why it's so serious. That's why it's so serious. It exposes a greater perversity that's practiced against nature. How low can humanity go? That's the third revelation here, the end of 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." And that's the end of the road here. In the

persistent hatred of God, they receive from creation and conscience, they continue to suppress it, continue to push it down, and then their minds, their whole minds are given over to this.

We speak of total depravity. We speak of it affecting every part of who we are. What we're looking at here is the restraint lifted and the mind itself is totally given over to this evil continually so that Paul says they do what is not fitting and totally against nature. And he describes the end of the road here. "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 righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die," is this not our day, "they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them." In fact, if you don't celebrate it, you are outed from society.

Well, that's humanity in sin tonight. That's the overview. That's the big picture. Here's the path and here's what's hard. I know some of you have brothers and sisters or maybe children, maybe parents who do not believe and are rebelling. Does Paul intend for us to read Romans 1 and say it's over for them? Is that what he intends? That's not what he intends. I think the tendency when you just heard all this is to become discouraged, to give up, to think it's over, think things are as bad as they possibly could be. That's not what Romans 1 is going to tell us. That's not what the whole book of Romans is going to tell us. You know what I said last time? A lot of people don't like the first part of Romans and I had that man years ago who I said, "Just be patient. We're going to get to really good news in Romans." He couldn't even endure the first few sermons of Romans and left the church. There are people who can't hear this. Paul is telling us this for a reason. He's rehearsing all of this to say, "Yes, it's bad. Humanity's in a bad position before a holy God. It's a bad predicament. It can be the point of no return. Don't play with sin." We have to feel the weight of that but here it is, there's really good news in this book. Really good news in this book. There is a power still very present that is able to deliver people from this. You know who we have in this congregation. He travels and speaks all over on this. It's Christopher Yuan who was a practicing homosexual. We've had Rosaria here. And they don't mess around with this stuff. They are as strong as can be. "Don't play with this. God did a work in us. Don't play with this stuff. Sin's like a little lion." She said, "Remember, that little lion cub's cute and then it grows up and will devour you."

Back to 16, verse 16. Now you understand why power matters here. That word power is important for the book of Romans. There's a power of God that is operating in this present age. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation for all who will believe, for the Jew first and then the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" God gave a power that can shatter this and it's power from him. What God is doing right now, why we are still here, why I am preaching is precisely because he has commissioned pastors to go out over all the world and not entertain you to death but to preach the power of the gospel to deliver you from sin. And God's power by his Holy Spirit is shattering this in people's lives. It has the power to break the greatest sinners and break them, remember

the baptism a few weeks ago of a powerful Marine, to shatter the greatest of sinners who are entrenched in the greatest of sins, who have walked down what we think is the path of no return and have looked out over the cliffs of death and have stood on the end of it, ready to plummet themselves off into hell, Christ can lay hold of them and there is a power to deliver them in the preaching of the gospel. That's why we have to be under the preaching of the gospel, us and our children.

It happened to Jonah. It happened to Paul. What did Paul say of himself? "I am the chief of sinners." The gospel has announced something really good in the midst of all this. There's a different end of the road. It's the end of the road in the life of sin and rebellion and a brand new way of life that God takes a sinner who's in the pigsty of his sin and forgives him and washes him, cleanses him. You understand how bad the problem is though in Romans 1. That's why this is important. That's why we've got to preach this. That's why there's an urgency to this message. That's why we say flee sin and come to Christ. Repent and believe the gospel today. You can be forgiven. You can be washed whiter than snow of all that defilement and who here tonight has not tried at all in some way to run from God. How wonderful the love of Christ is to deliver us from all our sins and to save us from the wrath of God, saved from God, by God, through a Mediator who came down here, who is the Son of God, truly human and truly righteous, who has the power to bear that justice, release you and set you free. That is indeed really powerful, good news.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your everlasting gospel. Thank you for your favor. We ask, O Lord, as we see a society given over into these things, pursuing these things, that your great power would again shatter that dominion that seems so strong to break in people's lives, and that you would be merciful, that you would save, that you, Lord, would encourage us as you constantly do by pulling people, plucking them out of the fire, setting them before us and baptizing them so that we might see how great the power of the gospel is and have confidence in that and not be ashamed of it. We also realize that the whole counsel of God must be preached and people must understand what they need to be saved from. Be merciful, O Lord, and let us all tonight praise you, for we really never sought you but the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which is lost. You sought us. You found us. You delivered us. And so be merciful, O Lord, in these times, and gather in your people from all over the face of the world and may the powerful gospel continue to sound out. Bless us, O Lord, in the hearing of this gospel. In Jesus' name, amen.