

God's Wrath Poured Out

Romans 1:24-32

On one occasion, when I was in my teen years, I was invited to vacation with a friend at his family cottage.

The cottage was close to one of the small towns that line the coast of Lake Huron and we were there for a few days to a week.

One evening it was decided that we would go to a movie and so my friend's mom dropped us off, there were three of us, and the plan was that she would pick us up after the movie.

I have no idea what movie it was, but I vividly remember that when we came out of the theater my friend's mom had yet to arrive and it was already dark out.

This was before the days of cell phones so we were left with a choice, either wait for his mom to get there or walk back to the cottage.

How many of you know what the right decision was in that situation?

The right thing to do was wait, but we decided to walk instead.

Now to make matters worse, I could see lightning in the distance over the lake, but even so we decided to walk.

My friend assured us that it would only take 30-40 minutes to walk and all we had to do was follow the beach until we got to the light that we could see in the distance.

By the time we had made our way down to the water it had started to rain, the lightning had moved much closer, and the thunder felt louder than a few minutes before.

A few minutes more and we were being pelted with torrential rain and the wind had increased to the point where it took a decent effort to move forward.

My friend encouraged us by saying we only needed to get to the light and we would be fine.

Within moments of that reminder the light went out.

After another 5-10 minutes we saw some headlights coming down a nearby road and when they got close enough we recognized my friend's family van.

The window rolled down and we were strongly encouraged to get in and once inside endured a well-deserved tongue lashing for our foolish choices.

[The thing about that situation is we knew better! We knew the right thing to do was to wait for my friend's mom, but we decided to do what we wanted instead and it wasn't long before we were in a bad situation. We do that as human beings don't we? We know the right thing to do but we decide to do something different instead and end up in a world of trouble, often times we don't even realize how much trouble we are in. That is certainly true when it comes to the

things of God. We are reminded of that in our text for this morning **Romans 1:24-32**. These verse continue the apostle Paul's teaching on God's wrath being revealed from heaven upon humanity. In verses 18-23 we learn why God's wrath is revealed, and in verses 24-32 we learn what that looks like in the here and now. We can see that in at least three ways in these verses. Firstly, we see here that...]

Point #1 – God's wrath puts people in the prison of their own desires. (Verses 24-25)

The human heart, apart from grace, wants to do evil and so when the LORD makes a decree from His throne to remove His grace people sink deeper into their own wicked pursuits.

Verse 24 begins with the important word 'therefore'.

That word takes us back to verse 19-23 where we are told that humanity has 'supressed the truth', that people have knowingly rejected what God has revealed of Himself and have instead worshipped created things.

That is the reason why the 'wrath of God is revealed from heaven' and now we are told what it is in **verse 24**.

This verse destroys the idea of a weak or helpless god unable to do anything about the sin of humanity.

That is the kind of picture that many Christians have in their minds.

They say things like, "God can only do so much", or "The LORD does lead anyone anywhere they don't want to go."

I believe people are well meaning when they say and think things like that, but it presents an untrue and unhelpful theology.

The God of the Bible is all-knowing and all-powerful and He has the power to restrain the evil of the human heart as He sees fit.

That is exactly what this verse is teaching. That the LORD Who is seated on the highest throne in the universe is making a sovereign decree to hand people over to the desires of their hearts.

Commentator Colin Kruse makes the helpful point that the phrase 'gave them up' is used repeatedly in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to describe giving the nation of Israel into the hands of their enemies on account of their idolatry.

That is God made a decision to give power to nations so that Israel would lose battles/wars and come under the control people seeking to do them harm as a means of bringing judgement against them.

This is God's wrath revealed from heaven and notice that the desires of the human heart here turn into more than feelings there are also actions that impact the physical body as well.

That is the nature of rebellion against the LORD, the consequences are both spiritual and physical which is emphasized throughout this passage.

On this point people will often protest, “How could God just give people over to evil if He has the power to stop it?”

Often the very same people will say, “God is unfair in keeping people from what they want!”

The truth is people are unhappy because they don’t like the justice and sovereignty of God, they think themselves fit to sit in judgement upon the LORD rather than subject themselves to His Rule and King of kings.

We are reminded of that again in **verse 25**.

The LORD is being perfectly just in handing people over to their own evil desires because they have willfully exchanged ‘truth’ for ‘a lie.’

What is the lie? The lie is that created things can be valued or served as though they are equal to or greater than the LORD.

How can you compare the temporary to the eternal, how can you compare the finite to the infinite, or the common to the Holy?

This is the very reason God is so passionately against idolatry.

Think of the first two commandments God speaks from Mount Sinai to the people of Israel.

Commandment one, “You shall have no other gods.” Why?

Because there are no other gods, there is no one else even close to God.

Commandment two, “You shall not make carved images/idols.”

Why? Because if you say god is like a statue or any other created thing you are saying He is far less than He is.

If the whole of creation cannot contain His glory, how great of a lie is it to try and contain Him to a statue of some kind?

It is the greatest evil that takes place in the human heart and it is a fierce judgment to give people over to such desires because it always leads to destruction.

[A few times I have seen a picture of two people standing on a plank. One end of the plank is on solid ground and the other plank is hanging over a cliff. The person standing on solid ground represents a Christian Worldview and the person standing on the plank over the edge of the cliff is our society. Our society increasingly wants God’s Word to be cast aside. Our society has exchanged the truth of God for a lie and when it gets what it wants it will plunge to disaster. You might say, “I don’t believe that. We live in a land of God’s blessings not judgement.” No doubt we live in a land of material abundance but it is also a land of great spiritual poverty. As the description of God’s wrath continues in the next two verses it is obvious that this second aspect to God’s wrath is happening in our own land. When the LORD gives people over to their own evil desires they are under God’s wrath and...]

Point #2 – Under God’s wrath people lose the goodness of His designs. (Verses 26-27)

There is purpose in how we are made and when people are given over to evil the blessings of those purposes disappear.

Once again we are told about God giving people over to evil desires. Verses 26-27

The plain meaning of this text is inescapable.

I know there are many pastors and churches that teach the opposite of what is written here.

They will say things like the culture was different back then and what we have today is not sin.

They will say things like, “We don’t have to listen to Paul because Jesus never said anything about this issue.”

They will say, “Love is more important than doctrine.”

There is no end to what people who play church and hate God will say to turn people away from the authority of the Bible.

The devil has been doing that since his earliest interaction with humanity and his servants carry on his task to this day.

Jesus most certainly did speak to this issue when He affirms God’s design for marriage in Matthew 19:4-5.

It is also important to remember that Jesus’ ministry was primarily among the Jews. While they were far from innocent they had not pursued these kinds of passions in their society.

Paul, however, was Jesus’ servant/apostle among the gentiles and every commentary I read on this passage described this as common behaviour among the Greeks and the Romans.

The apostle is simply dealing with the issues that needed to be dealt with in the time and place where he ministered.

When he uses the word ‘natural’ here he means what is according to God’s design.

So the phrase ‘contrary to nature’ means going against the blueprints that the LORD established in the beginning.

What we need to understand here is that this is bigger than physical intimacy between people.

God’s design for marriage is bigger than a husband and wife.

God’s design for marriage and gender serves as a picture of the love that He has for His people through His Son Jesus Christ.

Acting like there is no Divine plan or design for marriage between one man and one woman is like saying you want nothing to do with God.

When we live like that we lose the goodness of His designs.

[I think most of us appreciate the importance of design. How many people here own a car? It is an amazing invention. Any kids here take the bus? Imagine how long it would take you to get to school if you had to walk? Now who can tell me what part of a car makes it move? That is right the engine. Most engines still run on gas and they also have oil in them. It is really important to put the gas where the gas is supposed to go and the oil where it is supposed to go. If you put oil where the gas is supposed to go or gas where the oil is supposed to go your car is going to break down really fast and then you will be stuck walking. You will lose all the good that the car can do.]

That is what is meant here by people ‘receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error’

There is a cost to abandoning God’s blueprints.

I want you to listen to a quote from a 2014 article published by the National Institute of Health which is run by the secular government of the United States.

It says, “Nearly three decades of research evaluating the impact of family structure on the health and well-being of children demonstrates that children living with their married, biological parents consistently have better physical, emotional, and academic well-being. Pediatricians and society should promote the family structure that has the best chance of producing healthy children.”

The truth of this passage is right in front of the face of our society and yet people suppress the truth and become subject to the wrath of God revealed from heaven.

[Sadly things do not stop at the kind of immorality described in verses 26-27. Idolatry is the beginning of every kind of rebellion against the Lord and when He gives people over to the evil desires of their hearts the consequences continue to follow. That is the third lesson concerning God’s wrath from this passage, that...]

Point #3 – Under God’s wrath people persist in brokenness. (Verses 28-32)

When the LORD gives people over to idolatry the protection of His laws are lost and harm comes upon people as a result.

Listen with me to verse 28.

Yet again we are reminded of the justice of God’s wrath.

This happens because people refuse to acknowledge God and for the third time in this passage we are told that He ‘gave them up’ this time to a ‘debased mind’.

The problem of idolatry is more than our passions and physical desires, it is also the pattern of thinking that develops over time.

It is important to remember that our culture arrived at its current position over a long period of time.

Not long ago I read a book entitled 'Strange New World' by Carl Trueman and in that book he traces the philosophical foundations for the current state of our society back hundreds of years.

Unsurprisingly, it follows the exact pattern that we see in this passage.

Priority given to desires which develops a pattern of thinking to validate those desires.

When people start down that road, we can expect God to give them up to such things.

Here is the result of that process.

Verses 29-31.

That is quite the list.

I want to call our attention to a few things here.

First, the things on this list violate God's law in some way and several words are directly listed in the Ten Commandments.

Covetousness, murder, deceit, disobedience to parents.

A heart given over to its own evil desires has no regard for Divine Law.

Next, notice the number of things listed that involve direct harm to other people.

Malice, murder, strife (that is conflict), gossip, slander, and being insolent (that is being rude or disrespectful to authority).

A godless life does more than just destroy your relationship with the LORD, it also destroys relationships between people.

Thirdly, notice the self-focus here.

Haughty and boastful.

To be haughty is to act in a prideful manner, in a way that suggests you think you are better than other people.

To be boastful is to announce your own manufactured self-importance to others.

Is it any wonder he calls this life of idolatry 'foolish' in verse 31?

Pride is nothing but self-delusion.

Such things lead to isolation, anger, and loneliness.

Lastly, I call your attention to those given up to a 'debased mind' being 'haters of God [and] inventors of evil.'

Inventing evil suggests that the heart given over to evil is never satisfied.

People in such a state are always asking the question, "Is this it? Surely there must be more. What can I do now to drown out the sorrow of my soul?"

Hating God suggests bitterness and anger towards the LORD.

I am regularly amazed at how people who claim to not believe the bible get so angry with the God of the Bible and with people who put their faith in Him.

It is not enough for people to stop buying bake goods from a cake shop that refuse to participate in a gay wedding, they must go to court protest in anger trying to shut the place down.

It's not enough to say, "I disagree with you and I think you are too old fashioned."

There must name calling and yelling and laws passed to makes passages in the bible like this illegal in public.

Why so angry? I believe **verse 32** shows us.

Even though the LORD has given them over to their own evil desires and they have pursued them with delight, there is still the knowledge that what is being done is wrong.

When that is the situation a person only has two options; repentance or continue repeating the lie to yourself and others in the hope that you will some day be able to sear your conscience to the point where the knowledge of God no longer troubles you.

That I believe is where we are as a society.

Whether you look at the government, the education system, news, or entertainment it seems fairly plain that a line has been crossed from simply doing evil to approving and delighting in it.

Charles Hodge makes a powerful observation about this condition.

He says, "*This is the lowest point of degradation. To sin, even in the heat of passion, is evil; but to delight in the sins of others, shows that men are of set purpose and fixed preference, wicked.*"

When I read these verses and I look at our country it seems fairly obvious that we live in a place that is experiencing the wrath of God revealed from heaven.

That is a sobering thought, but it is no reason for despair.

The apostle Paul did not despair in his mission in a time and place where he saw the same things, but instead the dire situation of his fellow human being compelled him to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ because it is "*the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...*"

You see while God giving people over to their evil desires is an act of judgement and wrath, it also leaves open the possibility for redemption.

It is possible that people come to the end of themselves and turn to the LORD for forgiveness and restoration.

There is no amount of sin that the blood of Christ cannot cover, there is no amount of rebellion that cannot be undone with repentance and faith in the One Who lived, died, and rose again for you.

[Isn't that the point of the parable of the Prodigal Son? What does the father do when the son wants his money to leave home? He gives him over to his evil desire. What happens when the son hits rock bottom and decides to come home? The father forgives and restores him.]

That is the power of the gospel.

It will save us from God's wrath and bring us into His glorious kingdom forever.

The gospel can and does set people free from the prison of their own evil desires, it invites people back to enjoy the goodness of God's designs, and it heals our brokenness.

That is the good news that our world needs to hear. Let's pray together and ask the God would open eyes and ears to this wonderful truth.