

**Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church**

107 East Austin

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

**A1424 – June 15, 2014 – Romans 1:24-25
The Wrath Of God**

We are working with the first major section of Romans, chapter 1:18-3:20. The heading for this section is Condemnation. Paul's point is to show that the whole human race stands condemned before God. The following sections will take us out of this dark picture and into the light of the greatness of salvation. The way Paul divides the human race is not as is typically done in our modern world; by skin color or language, but rather by the two basic groups; Gentiles, the non-covenant nations and Jews, the covenant nation. He further sub-divides the Gentiles into pagan and cultured; pagan nations being those that have not had the influence of the light of Scripture and cultured nations being those who have had the influence of the light of Scripture. We know, however, that these lines are not strictly drawn because our nation began with far more biblical influence than it now has and over time we have become more pagan. So there are principles from both Gentile sections that apply to our country.

In any case, in Romans 1:18-32 Paul is showing that pagan Gentile nations, though they do not have the light of Scripture, are nevertheless condemned because they have creation and through creation they know God clearly but they do not honor Him as God or give thanks. Thus they are presently experiencing a form of the wrath of God. In 2:1-16 Paul will show that cultured Gentiles are condemned because they have their conscience but they do not live up to their conscience. Thus they are storing up a future form of the wrath of God. In 2:17-3:8 Paul will show that Jews are condemned because they have the Mosaic Law but they do not live up to the Law. Thus, they are storing up a future form of the wrath of God. In summary, in 3:9-20, Paul shows that God has continually reached out to men by creation, conscience and Law and yet no one has reached out to God. Therefore all are condemned, there is none righteous, no not one.

We are presently working with Romans 1:18-32, the condemnation of pagan Gentiles. Why are they condemned? Because they clearly see God in creation and yet they do not acknowledge Him as God or give thanks, but instead they suppress the truth they know about Him in unrighteousness and in exchange give alternative re-constructions of reality in a complex game of hide and seek. Essentially what kind of problems do they have? This is something we want to draw out. What is the fundamental problem in Romans 1:18-23? Theological! It's a theological problem. It's not an ethical problem, it's not loose morals; it's not behaviors like abortion, same-sex marriage, fornication, lying, murder and theft; it's not an epistemological problem, it's not an intellectual problem; that we don't have enough information or education. Fundamentally, it's a theological problem; they know God but they do not worship Him as God. Then, as a consequence, there are ethical and epistemological problems. The whole society suffers from the degraded behavior that goes on and from the false re-constructions of reality or worldviews that are propagated through the official tax-payer funded education system. But underlying all of this is the theological problem. So if we're interested in solving our nation's problems and we spend all our time aiming our guns at the ethical and epistemological problems; solving abortion, combatting the education system, then we're only shooting at the fruit not the root. To be effective we have to aim deep down at the root of the problem which is theological and this gets us immediately into evangelism, how we share the gospel and apologetics, how we defend the Christian faith.

So it's fundamental to grasp from Romans 1 that the basic problem in our society is the theological sin of not worshipping and serving the Creator. Does our nation, as a nation, worship God? No, we've rejected God. We can't post the 10 commandments, we can't pray in school, we can't wear T-shirts that mention God or Jesus Christ in school or bring a Bible to school, or at least that is the impression most people in public education are under. We've kicked God out of every institution and because of that most heinous sin we are seeing abortion, same sex marriage, fornication, murder, theft, evolution and all the rest of it. They are what we are reaping due to the theological sin that is sown in people's hearts. What should be our focus? If we aim to get people's hearts straight through evangelism and apologetics then the social sins will begin to dissipate. Until then we can war against these things and there's no doubt we should but the social sins will just continue to grow and

grow and grow if the heart issue is never addressed. And eventually we will become so weak as a nation that we either self-destruct or are destroyed by a foreign power. So Paul's point should be figured in when calculating how to be most effective in addressing the legion of problems in our nation. Fundamentally they are theological in nature.

Note how Paul sets it up in verse 18 when he said that the wrath of God is coming against "all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." The "ungodliness" refers directly to the theological sin of not worshipping God and the "unrighteousness" refers to the social sins that come about as a result. The first is the cause, the second is the effect.

Now we've focused in Romans 1:18-23 on the theological sin. In verse 18 they suppressed the truth in unrighteousness. In verse 19 what they suppressed was knowledge about God that was evident within them. In verse 20 the knowledge of God's specific attributes has been clearly seen through creation since creation so that everybody is left without excuse. In verse 21, even though they knew God they didn't glorify Him as God or give thanks, which was their duty, but instead they suffered futility in their speculations about reality and their foolish minds were darkened. In verse 22 they professed to be wise but actually they became fools. Verse 23 explains the foolery that resulted epistemologically, or as far as knowledge is concerned, they exchanged the truth of the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

What verse 23 is doing is explaining the form of the suppression in verse 18. They suppressed the truth. What form does that suppression of truth take? How do we detect it? We detect it when we see someone positing an alternate interpretation of the created order. They don't want to worship the incorruptible God who is the creator of the universe so they are doomed to explaining the universe by some alternative theory of origins. This is foolishness but it is a foolishness with a long history. It is attested, for example, by the ancient Babylonian creation myth, *Enuma elish* (translated: when above). This myth posits that the universe came out of a chaotic war between the gods. The universe in this view is an extension of the gods themselves and not distinct from the gods. Everything created from within the gods differed only by degree on a scale. The gods continued to war and the

victorious gods were seen as the explanation for a nation's political supremacy. Today this myth takes the form of *Evolution*. This myth posits that the universe came out of an infinitely small, infinitely dense universe that expanded into its present form. The universe is all that there is and everything created by the universe differs only by degree. Whether it is the ancient Babylonian creation myth or the modern evolution myth, it is nothing more than a humanly imagined myth designed to suppress the truth that they all once knew, the unthinkable thought that the eternal God created them and they are responsible to Him.

We made it to verse 23 but we said very little about nature worship so we want to take some time to consider the presence of nature worship in our culture. Paul says **They exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.** It is one or the other, you either worship God or you worship man and nature. History is replete with examples that support Paul's brief analysis.¹ We will only look at its modern form in the environmental or green movement. The Green Movement is nature worship. It is anti-human. One of their metaphors is to say that the planet has a cancer and that cancer is man. If man can be destroyed then the planet can be saved by the men who implement the policies that destroy men. In this religion environmentalists accomplish two objectives. First, they elevate nature above man as an object of worship and second they worship themselves as the saviors of nature. This fulfills precisely what Paul says in verse 23 that they glorify images in the form of corruptible men and of nature. They are so fervent in their religious devotion that they spend most of their time making policy in the UN and the EU and through individual nations that is intended to reduce the world population from 6.5 billion to 350 million by the year 2300. That's a 95% human death toll over the next 186 years. This nature religion blames man for the destruction of the environment. It claims that the industrial revolution has been carbon driven (true) and that this carbon has been released in dangerous amounts of CO₂ released into the earth's atmosphere (false). They claim that this man-made CO₂ is causing global warming that will ultimately cause catastrophic consequences if we don't put a stop to it by implementing policies to de-industrialize the world. Not only have their predictions of warming increase failed to amount to much but what is the most fundamental thing they have forgotten? It's a simple scientific fact you learned in the 3rd grade. CO₂ is

plant food. Plants thrive when there is more CO₂ available. What's good about having more plants? More plants means more food. What's good about more food? Less famine. Is less famine good? In my mind yes, it helps people survive; in their mind, no. Why? Because it doesn't kill people, which is their goal. So global warming policies are anti-human policies. They are meant to kill people. Are humans bad? Not in my mind; in their mind, yes, you're a carbon footprint and need to be eliminated. But in the Scriptural view man was made to be a good steward of nature and to make it productive and to feed the poor by giving them better technologies and increasing their quality of life. Have we done this? Did the innovative technologies developed during the industrial revolution on into our own time done this? History shows that consistently this is what humans have done. In the 1890's, when horses were the major mode of transportation, there was eight times more respiratory disease in cities due to all the horse manure than today when our highways are filled with millions of cars. The air today is far cleaner than it was when there were no cars. Furthermore, emissions have been significantly curtailed as automobiles advance. For example, which emits more toxins? A 1972 Mustang sitting in a driveway or a 2014 Mustang traveling 50mph down the highway? The answer is a 1972 Mustang sitting in a driveway does more to harm the environment than a 2014 Mustang driving down the highway. What's happening as technology improves is the environment is improving. Humans are not necessarily bad for the environment, they're creative. CO₂ is not bad either; it helps plants thrive so we have more food. The green worship is designed to stop all these things that have made life better so the world will be unable to support so many people. Their flawed policies are actually killing millions of people every year. For example, the use of DDT, the only effective deterrent in countries that are overrun with malaria, has been outlawed. The consequences are devastating. Approximately two million people die annually who could have been spared by its use. Another example is the destruction of the livelihoods of hundreds of communities in our country. A case in point is the policies put in place to protect the northern spotted owl. Environmentalists claimed that this bird's habitat was being destroyed by the logging industry. Their policies eventually shut down these logging communities. The result is that these once thriving communities are now destitute. Has the northern spotted owl been saved? No, the owl has continued to lose habitat and at a faster rate than before. It was policy based not on sound ecology but political bureaucrats who knew very little about ecology but a lot about their green philosophy. Ecologists tell us that now the

forests are overgrown and this is inhibiting the owl with his six foot wingspan from reaching his primary food source, a rat which lives on the forest floor. Another example is the environmentalists desire to destroy hundreds of dams across the US. Yet these dams provide clean energy run by water turbines, clean water for communities and safe housing developments lived in by millions of Americans. Why do they want to remove them? Ultimately because they desire to destroy humans but in the meantime they are the ones who stand to profit. All these environmental organizations will be lining up to bid for reconstructive projects after the dam's destruction in order to make improvements. In other words, a lot of this is about the money. But the environmental movement at the heart is verse 23, nature worship. It is a consequence of exchanging the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and nature.

In verses 24-32 we come to more of the wrath of God. If you scan back up to verse 18 you see that the wrath of God is presently being revealed from heaven against all this ungodliness. What does this wrath look like? We've seen the wrath epistemologically as people became futile in their speculations by re-interpreting the world in a complex game of hide-and-seek. But the wrath is also ethical, it affects men's behavior. We want to make four initial observations. First, in verses 24-32 God makes three judicial pronouncements. Each pronouncement is signaled by the phrase, "God gave them over." In verse 24 God gave them over to heterosexual immorality. In verse 26 God gave them over to homosexual immorality. In verse 28, God gave them over to a depraved mind and the 21 things that come out of a depraved mind listed in vv 29-31.

Second, the three 'giving over's' are present forms of God's wrath. Verse 18 used the present tense of "wrath" to reveal that God was presently angry with those who commit the theological sin of suppressing the truth about Him. So the heterosexual immorality, the homosexual immorality and the 21 horrible practices are themselves the present wrath but I would also say that they are storing up for them future wrath. In other words, God is releasing this present form of wrath to judicially set them for eternal wrath.

Third, God's present wrath is the removal of His restraining influence so that men follow a path of self-destruction. What this means then is that when we look out at our culture and we see these horrible immoralities we are seeing

God let our culture go. God is very gracious in exerting restraint but when men don't want Him anymore then He pulls back the restraint and lets them have what they want. And it is a scary commentary of what is going on in the hearts of others. We can see from what they do that they knew God but they did not honor Him as God and exchanged the glory that belonged only to Him for the corruptible idols of nature.

Fourth, observe that heterosexual and homosexual immorality are singled out instead of being lumped in with all the 21 depraved behaviors at the end. This points up the seriousness of these two sins. For some reason heterosexual immorality is especially serious. I would attribute that seriousness to its violation of divine institution #2 and 3: marriage and the family. A divine institution is something built into man or the social order of man such that when God's design for that institution is violated it reaps especially terrible consequences in a society. God will not be mocked. Marriage and family are sacred, they are not mere social conventions that we can twist and define however we want. If we play around with them there will be serious repercussions across the whole spectrum of society; law, economics, medicine, health, et. al.. So the present increase in heterosexual immorality that denigrates the divine institution of marriage and the family means what? That God is bringing our society to its end. He's allowing it to self-destruct. The other serious sin Paul points out is homosexual immorality. I would attribute the seriousness of this sin as a violation of design features inherent in man being made in God's image. In Genesis when God created man He said that a male and a female together is the fullest expression of the image of God. So when a male and male come together or a female and a female it is a rejection of the fullest expression of the image of God. It is an attempt to evade the fullest expression of the image of God. It is therefore a form of suppressing the truth about God that is revealed through the male/female relationship. So when we see homosexuality in our society it is a sign that God is doing what? Bringing our society to an end; that He is allowing it to self-destruct. So both heterosexual and homosexual behavior is a terrible consequence of the theological sin that is going on in people's hearts in this country and the more people in our society complicit in the theological sin the more of this behavior you will see and the faster our society will destruct.

The three downward steps begin in verse 24 where Paul says **Therefore**, a word signaling Paul's unyielding logical rigor, repeated in verse 26 and implied in verse 28 by 'just as.' There are three logical consequences ethically. In the first one, **God gave them over** to heterosexual immorality or what is known technically as fornication; sex outside of the bonds of the marriage covenant. The verb **gave over** is *παρεδωκεν*. It is a judicial penalty. The judicial penalty is that God removed his restraint, thus allowing their sin to run its course. So the judgment in these verses is not an active outpouring of divine wrath, as in the future Tribulation; that is coming too, but this is a removal of restraint that allows sinners to act freely on their sinful impulses. In verse 24 note that He gave them over **in the lusts of their hearts**, not **to the lusts of their hearts**. This means that their hearts were already **in** a state of lusts when God removed His restraint. The word **lusts** means "strong cravings" for forbidden things, things that are unnatural to desire and for some time they were not acting on them because of His restraint. But His giving them over **in the lusts of their hearts** allows them to now act on the unnatural desires that they already had. As we said, the unnatural desire here is heterosexual immorality. As Paul describes it, the **uncleanness of dishonoring their bodies among themselves**. Paul's description refers to the mutual giving over of a male and a female to sexual practices outside of marriage. This is destructive because it is contrary to the intended *place* and *purposes* of sex. The intended place of sex is within marriage. God designed sex to be enjoyed within marriage. Marriage is divine institution #2. God established it in the first marriage when He created Adam and then created Eve out of the side of Adam and put the two back together in marriage so that the two became one flesh. Marriage is a legally binding contract, whether it is ever consummated or not. Marriage is defined by the covenant that is made. The terms of the covenant are the marriage vows. When the vows are taken both parties are promising loyalty to those vows. Is this a big deal? Taking a vow in Scripture is very serious. If you vow something Proverbs says you better do it because you are putting yourself under a curse if you don't. So there are very serious and costly penalties for violating a marriage vow. Now within the marriage covenant each party has obligations. Paul teaches in 1 Cor 7 that one of the obligations of marriage is sexual intimacy. He says that "each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not

have authority over his own body, but the wife does." So the proper *place* of sex between a man and a woman is within marriage. The *purpose* of sex is two-fold; to procreate and for pleasure. First, for pleasure because God created the man and wife to enjoy one another in this most intimate act. This act is not physical only but a joining of two persons in both body and spirit. It is the closest and most intimate involvement a man and a woman can have with one another. Second, for procreation. Sex for procreation purposes is necessary to create the family. The family is divine institution #3. Adam and Eve were told to multiply and spread dominion. The family unit is the basic unit of society and spreading wise dominion over the earth. If the family structure breaks down then a society will break down. Therefore the integrity of the family is vital to upholding a society. Paul singles out the dangers of sex outside of marriage because it's inevitable ripping and tearing at these two divine institutions. The consequences are extremely costly. Note that Paul says it is **impure** or unclean. The word in this context hints at the inevitable consequence of transmitting sexual diseases among other things. It is unclean to have sex in a casual setting or with more than one person. The uncleanness may create psychological frustration, economic hardship and medical problems. Yet God gives them over to this wicked behavior because they reject Him. The fulfillment of their cravings is not without further consequences. God will not be mocked. Those who practice sex outside of marriage put themselves at risk of becoming pregnant. Unwanted pregnancies often result in unwanted children. Unwanted children may result in the horror of abortion or the child being unloved and forgotten. As for the children of those born outside of marriage they suffer the whole gamut of mental and spiritual problems. They are far more likely to have sex outside of marriage and further the sin problem another generation. As for society as a whole, it does not escape the consequences, particularly in the realm of sanitation, law and economics. In the end, even if unwanted children, legislation and unwanted diseases are avoided it is still not a good idea. Proverbs 5 teaches that each man should get water from his own cistern and that if he gets water from cistern after cistern that he is wasting his vigor and losing his ability to get pleasure from sex. The bottom line is that God created sex to be practiced within marriage for procreation and pleasure and so sex outside of marriage has immense consequences. Heterosexual immorality is the first signal that God is turning that society loose to self-destruction.

Verse 25 almost repeats verse 23 as the reason God turned them loose. **For they exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.** Again, as if we might forget, this theological sin is the real problem. The heterosexual immorality is only a consequence. They made an exchange in their hearts. The exchange was one of the truth of God for the lie. **The lie** here is idolatry, it is worshipping and serving **the creature rather than the Creator.** To worship the creation is to be an idolater. Idolatry is a serious mental problem. Those who worship the creation which cannot speak by attributing to it god-like attributes are mentally depraved. They have bought into the lie and are paying the consequences in their unclean heterosexual activity.

In conclusion, verses 24-25, heterosexual immorality, is an exceptional indication of a society gone sour and God allowing it to self-destruct. Ultimately, however, the problem is not the heterosexual immorality or the homosexual immorality, but the theological immorality being committed in their hearts. Therefore our focus should be on reaching people for Christ through evangelism and being always ready to give an apologetic to any who would ask for a reason for the hope that is in us. Apart from this focus the immorality will only continue and become more open and more blatant and more accepted.

ⁱ The ancient Egyptians worshipped nature by attaching deities to the various aspects of nature. For example, Re was the sun god. The sun was viewed as the creator and ruler of all life. Shu was the air god. The air was viewed as the source of wind and breath. Etc..etc...etc...In other words, the Egyptians personified nature and worshipped nature in order to keep in harmony with nature. They were polytheistic just as Paul said they would be because they rejected God. The Canaanites also worshipped nature by attaching deities to nature. Baal was the god of fertility in land and animals. The worship of Baal was mainly sexual in nature because worshippers thought that by having sex they could stimulate Baal to fertilize their crops and impart fertility to their animals. They believed that man could manipulate the gods and goddesses in order to get what they want. Molech was the god of fire and child sacrifice to appease this god was common in the ancient world. Rumor even has it that child sacrifice to Molech is alive and present in America today in secret societies. When we come to the Greeks Paul's thesis is confirmed again. They also worshipped nature by attaching deities to nature. Cybele was the earth or mother goddess and was closely related to mother earth worship and modern Gaia worship, central to the environmentalist movement. She was seen as associated with fertility and life. Demeter was the goddess of the harvest and fertility of the earth. A poor harvest meant Demeter was unhappy with men and men responded by seeking to appease Demeter. The story of nature worship continues in Rome as the names were adapted and brought over into Roman culture and worship.

