

## Romans, Part 5 5-8-22

### Wrath & Reprobation

We are in our fifth study in the epistle of Romans, the magnificent work of the apostle Paul. Our first three weeks we dealt with introductory matters and then last Sunday we got to the opening comment of the author on the subject of the letter which is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul said that he was not ashamed of it because the gospel is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes. He said that in this gospel the righteousness of God is revealed. Over the next several chapters, Paul is going to unpack that and he does so, beginning with something else that belongs to God being revealed. Note carefully what that is. Romans 1:18-32 *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,<sup>19</sup> because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.<sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.<sup>21</sup> For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.<sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools,<sup>23</sup> and 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.<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.<sup>25</sup> For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.<sup>26</sup> For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,<sup>27</sup> and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.<sup>28</sup> And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,<sup>29</sup> being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,<sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,<sup>31</sup> without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;<sup>32</sup> and although they know the*

*ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.*

This is God's word. This is God's word. And I am committed to teaching it in such a way that I won't be embarrassed when my hearers go off and study it for themselves. That thought is quite relevant for our contemplations today because you probably noticed what thing belonging to God has been revealed. Did you see it? *The wrath of God is revealed.* The what? The wrath of God. The anger of God. The NLT translates it this way: 18 (NLT) *But God shows His anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.* There is a large church sign on I-4 in Orlando that I have passed many times. It says simply, *God is not angry.*® And then, the sign provides the name of the church that is declaring that. I wish such a message from churches was rare, but it is far from rare. I looked at Google images and saw dozens of other church signs with the same message. And I can't help but wonder – those who attend churches like that, how do they respond when or if they actually read the book and discover how pervasive is the notion that our holy God is, in fact, angry with rebel sinners. How do they react when they study Paul and discover that his exposition of the good news of Jesus begins with, begins with, is predicated on this proposition that God is bringing judgment on a sin-sick world.

Seriously, the gap between the message of the modern church and the message of the New Testament grieves me greatly. Another thing I have heard more times than I can count is this – *you don't need to tell people they are sinners. Everyone knows it already.* Really? Is that a new thing? Because Jesus and Paul, John the Baptist and Isaiah seemed to think that people needed this pointed out. Paul will end his exposition of the gospel by declaring that nothing can separate a believer in Jesus from the love of God, but he starts his gospel instruction with this – the wrath of God. The Greek word is *orge* – That is one of the two main words for wrath in the New Testament. The other is *thumos*, which is related to our word for *heat*, and *thumos* refers to a violent rage. But *orge* means, *to grow ripe for something.* It depicts wrath as something that builds up over a long period. *Orge* is the normal word for referring to God's wrath. Leon Morris writes: *The Biblical writers habitually use for the divine wrath a word which denotes not so much a sudden flaring up of passion which is soon over; as a strong and settled opposition to all that is evil arising out of God's very nature.* Is God's nature wrathful then? I don't think so – wrath is not an attribute of God so much as a reaction of God to sin. The relevant attribute is God's holy justice – His holy justice that must punish

sin. To anyone who has read the Old Testament, what Paul says here cannot take you by surprise. God is depicted in many, many places and ways as a holy God who gets angry over sin, and punishes sin – starting in the garden of Eden. Then we have passages like this one from the prophet Nahum 1:1-3 *The oracle of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. <sup>2</sup>A jealous and avenging God is the Lord; the Lord is avenging and wrathful. The Lord takes vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies. <sup>3</sup>The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.* Then he goes on in verse 6 *Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire.* Throughout the Old Testament God's anger is described as a fire. It is hot anger. His anger is kindled. Or His anger burns. Just open your Bible and read. This doctrine needs no defense for any sincere Bible student. God gets angry. He is often provoked to wrath.

But, oh my, how offensive this is to modern man and modern society, even the modern church. To believe in a God who punishes sin is archaic, puritanical, primitive – or so I am told. It is sad to find so many professing Christians who regard the wrath of God as something for which they need to apologize. It is virtually regarded as a blemish on the divine character. They don't like to think of it and want no one to mention it. Some believe it to be inconsistent with God's goodness and so inwardly or outwardly they deny it. But, to deny the wrath of God, you must create your own idea of God; and we call that idolatry. It also, by the way, will undercut our appreciation of the immense saving love which comes to us in Jesus. Ultimately, those who most appreciate the wrath of God will most value the dying love of God's son for sinners. But, I have found that even some of you who get what I am saying may still have problems with God's judgments. And the reason is that you, like me, don't see God's holiness as you should. So, you balk at God's anger. On judgment day there will be no objecting. Mouths will be shut. Once we see God, as he really is, we will know that his condemnation of sinners is just. Then and only then will we see how vile and damnable our sin is. Because we will see God's holiness and his patience. He is called a longsuffering God, slow to anger. The Old Testament isn't so much a record of God's anger, as a record of His forbearance. But sin provokes God, resulting in his judgments. In the much-loved third chapter of John we read that many men stand under judgment already because the light has come into the world and they preferred the darkness. This is similar to what Paul is writing here. He announces that the wrath of God is being

revealed – present tense, suggesting it is here and continuing. This is not some warning of future wrath. He is telling us we can observe it right now. The New Testament does speak plenty of a wrath that is to come for sure. That is the overwhelming, devastating wrath of the Lamb at the end of the age – but there is a wrath already on display which we do well to understand. Let's apply our minds to doing just that.

18 *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.* Paul then goes on to elaborate on this idea of suppressing the truth and what that means – which we will talk about. But he comes around in verse 24 to say 24a *Therefore God gave them over. Therefore God gave them over.* The NLT says, *God abandoned them.* Uh-oh. Those are scary words. It suggests that God was somehow with someone, held on to someone, but, at some point, he let go. The whole verse says 24-25 *Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.* <sup>25</sup>*For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.* You following this? This giving over that God does, leads to aggravated moral rot. They rejected Him and rejected Him and finally He says, *have it your way.* Some of you who are parents are painfully familiar with this dynamic. The next verse provides yet more – 26-27a *For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,* <sup>27</sup>*and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another.* Okay, we are getting specific now about some of the degradation which results from divine abandonment. But the language is the same, *God gave them over.*

Now follow me closely here. This common moral slide of human beings can be observed from different angles. From one perspective Paul says that aggravated depravity results from God giving you over to your sin, and yet, from a different perspective, Paul says that it results from the sinner's choice to do so. Speaking of pagan sinners, the apostle writes that they Ephesians 4:19 *Having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.* So, which is it? Does God give them over or do they give themselves over? This is the old problem with Pharaoh in Exodus – Remember that? In that story we read multiple times that God hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he would not release the children of Israel and we read that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. The Bible seems to have no problem speaking in both

ways and I have to conclude that the two ideas are not truly in opposition. Because humans harden their hearts toward God, he often hardens their hearts yet more, as judgment upon them. Psalm 81:11-12 *My people did not listen to My voice, and Israel did not obey Me. <sup>12</sup>So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in their own devices.* Our Lord removes restraining grace. Sin is both cause and effect. Sinning people are allowed the freedom to sin more blatantly as restraining grace is taken away. You can call this judicial hardening. Judicial hardening or judicial abandonment. Another term for it is *reprobation*. The result of it is that sin gives birth to sin until individuals or societies become cesspools of iniquity, which serve as testimonies to the present-day judgments of God, rooted in his holy justice and sometimes called *wrath*.

What are the consequences of this wrath? Well, Romans 1 lays it out for us. Verse 24 suggests that they will do shameful things that dishonor their own bodies. Elsewhere Paul says that the immoral man sins against his own body. Then we get more detail. Verses 26-27 reference homosexual conduct. Clearly. Now listen – any lust that is directed toward a person not your spouse is outside of God’s will. I don’t mean by that – any sexual attraction. Humans are wired naturally to have a certain animal magnetism. It is okay to notice the appeal of another human. But lust goes beyond that, taking root in the heart and making another person the object of one’s pursuits either outwardly or mentally. Sin turns what is natural attraction into an ungodly preoccupation. That can apply to hetero-lust or homo-lust. Both are wrong, but the latter is one step further down the path of degradation because it pertains to a relationship the apostle calls *unnatural*. The Roman Catholic church’s position on this states that homosex is *intrinsically disordered*. That is a good way to put it. There has never been any real dispute about this among those who esteem the Scriptures. The Old Testament prescribed the death penalty for homosexual sins, even as it did for heterosexual adultery. The attempt to defend homosexual conduct from the Bible is just silly. The denominations that pretend this can be done would be better off burning their Bibles than to so flagrantly slander them. Fair arguments are held around the matter of same-sex attraction and how Christians are to view that. If you ask me if someone can be a homosexual and be a Christian, I have to ask whether this supposed person is behaving in accordance with Scripture or acting on their lusts. Most people have inappropriate attractions. I certainly do. But, if we are seeking to walk in purity and to think in purity, that is pleasing to the Lord, even as we await and pray for the alignment of our appetites and our values.

So, Romans is entirely clear on this – homosexual practice results from humans giving themselves over to their self-centered lusts, and thus being abandoned by God, to the end that their physical bodies show forth divine wrath. Diseases have always ravaged those who practice these things. The latest figures from the Center for Disease Control shows that those who participate in homosex are fifty times more likely to contract the HIV virus. The disease started exclusively in the homosexual community. And this is a group that makes up only 2-3% of our population. Jeffrey Satinover, a psychiatrist from MIT and Harvard, reports other medical harm that is typically associated with homosexual practice. *A twenty-five to thirty year decrease in life expectancy. Chronic, potentially fatal liver disease – infectious hepatitis. Fatal rectal cancer. Multiple bowel and other infectious diseases. And a much higher than usual incidence of suicide.* Were these statistics associated with church attendance we would be shut down by the health department. Some of these statistical realities result from the sexual behavior, others come from suicide, homicide and drug overdoses which are far, far more common among homosexuals than among others.

All of this is terribly sad, but clearly it is the manifestation of judgment against a world that is hostile to God. Look again at 28 *Just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper.* God haters become not just more sinful, but actually crazy. This is more apparent now than at any point in my lifetime. The whole LGBTQ agenda flows out of this judgment. Gallup did a survey some months back that yielded some interesting numbers. 7.1% of Americans now identify as LGBT. This number has doubled in a decade. Doubled. Generationally it is more scary. Older Americans identify as LGBT at a rate of under 1% but GenZ is at 20.8%. Is this just because the oppression is lessened? You know it is not. This is a diabolical, as in devilish, plan to destroy young lives and the society in which they live. Things which were considered mental illnesses ten minutes ago are now to be celebrated and protected. When a 9-year-old girl says, *I feel like a boy*, what are we to do? We should recognize first that such a statement is technically meaningless since the little girl has no reference point for how it feels to be a boy. She means something by it and that something is worth exploring - but parents used to call this a phase. Now we are told we must affirm it, celebrate it and maybe even impose drugs and surgery on it. This is madness of the highest order. Social commentators only go so deep when discussing this phenomenon, but Christians can go much deeper because Romans takes us to the heart of it. It is enmity

against the Creator and the wrath, the judicial abandonment, that often follows. It explains how we have gotten to the place where we approve of killing children before or soon-after birth. We insist that the society itself should pay for such abominations. We even tolerate selling the body parts of those babies for idolatrous scientific research. Where do we see God's wrath revealed? In the devastation of our families, in the collapse of civil society, in our souls which are lost and prone to all kinds of addiction and self-harm.

In Scripture we are pointed to Pharaoh, who destroyed his family and his nation because of his hardness of heart. But more to the point would be Nebuchadnezzar. This is the king of Babylon whose dreams were interpreted by Daniel, who witnessed God's deliverance of Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego, who was warned by Daniel about the dangers of pride and yet he still insisted on self-exaltation until – God gave him over. The great king became like a mindless beast. He became a total fool, a crazy, wild-man. You think of Saul, the first king of Israel. Appointed by God to this high position. Granted by God abilities to lead the nation – but then he ignored God's commands, he opposed God's man, David, he defied God's priest, Samuel, and Saul went mad. He lost his mind and then his life. In every case, the insanity is traced back to how an individual man responds to God. John MacArthur tells this interesting story – about ants. He says there's a species of ant that lives in some parts of Africa, that lives in these subterranean tunnels and they go way down into the earth and they go way up, they usually pile them up around some kind of a tree. Down in the subterranean part of these things is where they put the young ants and they shelter them there, and that's where the queen is housed. And the queen is in charge of this massive millions of little insects. And the workers go on their way and they have to forage for food and they go out to distant places and they come back with all the stuff the whole colony needs to eat. When the workers are away, if the queen is disturbed, the workers, even though they're far away from the nest, become immediately nervous and uncoordinated because there's some kind of connection between them and the queen. If she's killed, they become frantic, rush around aimlessly and die out in the field. And what they've concluded is that there's some kind of radar device that works between this one queen and every one of these ants. If she's killed, they are instantly disoriented and a frenzy takes place that ends in death. This is what happens when humans lose their connection with God. Interestingly, Proverbs one sort of told us about all this long before Paul came around. Proverbs 1:29-31 (NLT) *For they hated knowledge and chose not to fear the Lord.* <sup>30</sup>*They rejected my*

*advice and paid no attention when I corrected them. <sup>31</sup>Therefore, they must eat the bitter fruit of living their own way, choking on their own schemes.*

I think we have said enough on all this – we have to turn a corner and get our bearings in the truth before we close. There is reason to not yield to despair. Romans tells us that all this craziness and corruption arises from the wrath of God. That means two good things – One is that God is still in control. This world is not out of control. God is on his throne. There is hope there. And the second good thing is that he is a Redeemer. A Redeemer. Romans one is all about the R words – Wrath, Rejection, Reprobation. Next week we will discuss revelation and responsibility – but where it all leads is – redemption! Yes! Romans 3:24- sneak peek – says that decadent sinners, regardless of how deeply they have sunk into the cesspool of sin, these decadent sinners who come to faith will be 24 *justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.* Amen? I Corinthians 6 says even more 9-11 *Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, <sup>10</sup>nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup>Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.* You see what that is saying? In the infant church there were all these types of people. They had gone very deep into the far country, into decadent, destructive lifestyles, but what then happened? They encountered the saving power of God in the gospel and they were changed forever. I tried to find a story to tell you of someone, like a Rosaria Butterfield, who went from active homosexual sin to Christian faith - and when I looked on the internet there were dozens, maybe hundreds of such. Is there hope? Oh my! We serve the God of hope. The teaching on wrath and reprobation which we must engage is only meant to intensify our longing for the redemption which is available in Jesus. As desperate, needy sinners, let's grab it gustily and proclaim it boldly. Grab it for yourself and offer it to others. It is easy to despair and say, *look what the world is coming to?* But the gospel reminds us of the hope that says, *look what is coming to the world!* Jesus.