

Without Excuse
Romans 1:18-32
January 31, 2016

Intro.

- Paul wrote the letter of Romans as an advance communication in preparation for his visit to the capital city.
 - In Paul's day, one of the greatest fears that a public speaker faced was that his message might be invalidated or shown to be false.
 - This would bring incredible shame to the speaker.
 - Paul has no questions about his message, however.
 - He is not ashamed because the gospel is the power and righteousness of God for all who believe.
 - What makes this such good news is when it is seen in light of the situation of the human race.
 - If you were to ask the question to a group of people in the lunch room or on social media, "What's wrong with the world?", you'd get a whole host of answers.
 - There are several people running for President right now who would not only be glad to tell you what's wrong with the world but how they are the right ones to fix it.
 - Paul proceeds here in Romans 1 to tell us, from God's perspective, what's really wrong with the world.
 - Our greatest problem is that we are under the wrath of God.
 - For many people, probably even some of you here today, even mentioning the wrath of God is not simply offensive but it is unimaginable.
 - You cannot even reasonably conceive that any God worth believing in would be wrathful. Verse 18 is clear that God's wrath is being revealed from heaven.
 - This is uncomfortable to talk about.
 - For many people, wrath is a quality that they associate with abuse.
 - It is a volatile anger that is the opposite of love.
 - Many people have suffered under the wrath of another person and cannot fathom God as being like this.
 - God is loving and just, and what makes his wrath right is that it is never like our wrath.
 - God's wrath never compromises his love or his justice.
 - Instead, God's wrath is his announced and measured action to uphold his justice and demonstrate the purity of his love.
 - J.I. Packer explains it this way: "God's wrath against sin is not a fitful flicker, but a steady blaze; not a mark of uncertain temper, but an aspect of the consistent righteousness of the just Judge of all the earth."
 - There is a sense in which God is good to reveal his wrath.
 - In telling us about the danger of our condition, we have been fairly warned.
 - No one will be surprised by God's wrath.
 - I want to show you why the Bible says God's wrath is justified, how God shows his wrath, and finally why his wrath cannot be ignored.
1. Why God's wrath is just (vs. 18-21)
 - a. Notice with me why God's wrath is being revealed.
 - i. The text tells us that God's wrath is being revealed against "godlessness and wickedness."

- ii. "Wickedness" is a fine descriptive word, but I think the ESV is more helpful by translating this as unrighteousness.
 - iii. Sin, by its very nature, is a negation.
 - iv. It is a parasite that has no life of its own apart from something good.
- b. Sin isn't just breaking some list of rules.
 - i. Sin is an attempt to de-god God; it is god-less-ness.
 - ii. Sin is anything that is not right; it is *un*-righteousness.
- c. Where does this come from?
 - i. Is sin some outside force or some feature of our environment?
 - ii. No, the Bible tells us that sin springs up from within us.
 - iii. Look at verse 18.
- d. Have you ever tried holding a beach ball under water?
 - i. It takes effort and determination.
 - ii. If you let up for just a moment, the ball will pop immediately up to the surface.
 - iii. Paul says this is the human knowledge of God.
 - iv. God has revealed himself so clearly in creation that human beings have to actively work to deny it.
 - v. Former atheist Whittaker Chambers confessed:

My daughter was in her high chair. I was watching her eat. She was the most miraculous thing that had ever happened in my life. I liked to watch her even when she smeared porridge on her face or dropped it meditatively on the floor. My eye came to rest on the delicate convolutions of her ear—those intricate, perfect ears. The thought passed through my mind: "No, those ears were not created by a chance coming together of atoms in nature....They could have been created only by immense design." The thought was involuntary and unwanted. I crowded it out of my mind.... I had to crowd it out of my mind. If I had completed it, I should have had to say: Design presupposes God.

- e. The natural conclusion of this is that people are without excuse.
 - i. No one anywhere will be able to stand before God and claim that they did not know about him.
 - ii. You may be able to appeal to the judge that you did not know what the speed limit was, but you will not be able to appeal to God that you did not know who he was.
 - iii. God's wrath is justified because all people are actively working to suppress what they know about God
 - iv. The consequences for this are devastating.
 - v. By trying to put a lid on the beauty of God's glory and failing to be grateful to him for it, humanity has been plunged into darkness and people can no longer see reality clearly.
- f. The world will not find Jesus on their own.
 - i. This is one of the main reasons we send out missionaries to translate the Bible.
 - ii. People without God's Word in their language cannot hear the good news.
 - iii. The condition of the world is dire.
 - iv. But the problem is even worse.

2. How God's wrath is displayed (vs. 22-31)
 - a. Verses 22-31 explain to us how people suppress God's truth and how God's wrath is displayed as a result.
 - i. What we find is that God's wrath is not just some future judgment waiting for us on the other end of the horizon.
 - ii. God's wrath is a present reality.
 - iii. God's wrath is actively on display today and is a response to three exchanges that people make.
 - iv. As people trade away various assets, God responds by revealing more of his wrath.
 - v. God punishes sin with more sin.
 - b. People exchange God's glory for created images.
 - i. At the crudest level, this is making literal idols.
 - ii. However, at the deeper level, this is looking for security, fulfillment, or validation in anything except God.
 - iii. Is anyone else here sick of the rain? (It's okay to say "yes.")
 - iv. Do any of you wish you could escape to somewhere else, just for a week or two?
 - v. Now imagine holding the title of your house in your hand, and then trading that title for a postcard of a cabana on a Caribbean beach—not the cabana itself, just the postcard.
 - vi. It sounds ridiculous, but that is the very trade that people make every day when it comes to God.
 - vii. They trade away his glory for images.
 - c. Verse 24 reveals God's judgment on this exchange.
 - i. This is the first of three occurrences of the phrase "God gave them over."
 - ii. This is a legal term that declares the sentence of a judge handed out to a convicted criminal.
 - iii. In this case, God's sentence on trading away his glory is the desire for sexual impurity.
 - iv. Notice that this does not say sexual desire
 - v. There is nothing sinful about sexual desire, but people who do not value the excellence of God will crave the corruption of sex.
 - d. Do you see the connection here between people choosing images over God and the result of corrupted sexual desire?
 - i. This is exactly what we see in our culture today.
 - ii. Why is there so much sexual imagery in marketing?
 - iii. The statement is true: Sex sells.
 - iv. Images have trumped glory and captured the hearts of people.
 - e. It is currently fashionable to oppose human trafficking, and we should oppose it.
 - i. Investigations have shown that the primary motivation of human trafficking is sexual exploitation.
 - ii. We have heard stories of girls being exploited in the back alleys of India and Thailand, but this is a problem in our own backyard as well.
 - iii. Portland ranks among the leading cities in the U.S. for cases of human trafficking.
 - f. Here is the reality: Human trafficking is a significant vehicle of the porn industry.
 - i. If you look at pornography, you are contributing to the problem of human trafficking.

- ii. If you truly oppose human trafficking, you should stand against pornography.
- g. When people look at images on a screen they not only crave what is impure they are contributing to the degradation of the human body.
 - i. Romans 1:24 declares it, but there are voices within our culture that are also echoing this truth.
 - ii. Noam Chomsky, a libertarian social philosopher, has spoken out against pornography for this very reason:

"Pornography is the humiliation and degradation of women. It's a disgraceful activity. I don't want to be associated with it. Just take a look at the pictures. Women are degraded as vulgar sex objects. That's not what human beings are.... The fact that people agree to it and are paid is about as convincing as the fact that we should be in favor of sweat-shops in China where women are locked into a factory and work fifteen hours a day and the factory burns down and they all die.... If they get enjoyment out of humiliation of women, then they have a problem."

- h. There is a second exchange that takes place as a result of suppressing the truth of God.
 - i. People exchange the truth for a lie.
 - ii. This is exactly what happened in the Garden of Eden.
 - iii. Adam and Eve rejected the truth that God had given to them and exchanged it for the lie of the serpent.
 - iv. They chose to elevate themselves above God.
- i. It has been said that the opposite of belief in God is not atheism; it's a belief in anything.
 - i. Maria Konnikova is a psychologist who spent time researching con artists and the victims of cons.
 - ii. She found out that a significant number of cons went underreported, and through her research drew out some interesting conclusions.
 - iii. One of the reasons that people fall victims to cons is that most people have an innate desire to be lied to.
 - iv. People don't often want to hear what others really think of them.
 - v. "Does this shirt make me look fat?" Enough said.
 - vi. Konnikova also observed that our power of self-deception is incredibly strong because we want to see ourselves in the best possible light.
 - vii. People don't want to think of themselves as suckers, and so often they don't *want* to know they've been conned.
- j. So when Romans 1 tells us that people exchange the truth for a lie, this is not an exchange where people are being deceived in ignorance.
 - i. It is the consequence of a willful rejection of God.
 - ii. The result is further judgment from God.
 - iii. Look at v. 26.
- k. This is a further degrading of the desires of the human heart.
 - i. In v. 24, people acted sinfully on the desires of their hearts.
 - ii. Here, the desires themselves have been corrupted.
 - iii. This is closely related to the final exchange.
- l. People exchange the natural for the unnatural.
 - i. Look at vs. 26-27.
 - ii. In our culture, sexuality has become a category of identity.

- iii. "Gay" and "straight" define who people are.
- iv. However, the Bible does not make sexuality a category of identity.
- v. Instead sexuality is described in terms of desire and activity.
- m. It is a lie that you are heterosexual or homosexual.
 - i. The truth is that you have desires for people of the same sex or the opposite sex.
 - ii. The truth is that you will either glorify God by reserving all sexual activity for marriage as God has defined it or you will degrade your body by engaging in sexual activity outside of marriage.
- n. There are some who have said that our society's embracing of homosexuality will bring about God's judgment on us.
 - i. I have news for you.
 - ii. According to Romans 1, we're already under the judgment of God.
 - iii. The acceptance of homosexuality is the judgment of God.
 - iv. God has already handed us over and passed the sentence on us.
- o. The final present consequence is corrupted thinking that infects all of life.
 - i. Look at v. 28.
 - ii. When you think wrong things about God, it affects your whole life.
 - iii. What is surprising about this list is not how atrocious these sins are.
 - iv. Instead, we should be surprised at how common they are: envy, gossip, arrogance, disobedience to parents.
 - v. (You know, I had some one tell me this week that obedience is an archaic word?)
 - vi. These sins are mixed in equally with murder, hating God, and ruthlessness.
- p. Verse 32 concludes with the final expression of corruption.
 - i. "They approve of those who practice them."
 - ii. God does not offer amnesty to the person who says, "I don't do it, but who am I to tell someone else it's wrong."
- q. The first instinct of a Jewish audience to these indictments would have been to applaud Paul for calling out the idolatry of the Gentile world.
 - i. After all, the Gentiles were the ones who worshipped many gods and had shrines and temples throughout their cities.
 - ii. But the reality is that Paul was retelling Israel's history as well.
 - iii. The Old Testament recounts story after story of godlessness, unrighteousness, and idolatry among the people of Israel.
- r. The same is true today.
 - i. It is tempting to read the sins listed here and point fingers at others.
 - ii. We are prone to lay the blame for the condition of our country on those sinners "out there."
 - iii. But as this final section shows us, this is not a "them" problem.
 - iv. This is an "us" problem.
 - v. G.K. Chesterton was asked, "What's the problem with the world?"
 - vi. Chesterton replied, "I am."
- s. This is a problem we can't afford to ignore.
- 3. Why God's wrath cannot be ignored (v. 32).
 - a. Deep within the human heart is the acknowledgment that we all deserve God's wrath and condemnation.
 - i. I, Scott Gassoway, deserve to die.

- ii. We all have things we want to be saved from—dead end jobs, bad marriages, personal sins and faults.
- iii. Romans 1 tells us what we need to be saved most from is God's wrath.
- iv. Your greatest need is to be saved from the wrath of God.
- b. Please stay with me at this point.
 - i. Notice what Romans 1 does not say.
 - ii. Paul does not say, "Look at all these horrible things. Now stop that!"
 - iii. Stop looking at porn!
 - iv. Stop engaging in homosexuality!
 - v. Stop being greedy!
 - vi. He doesn't say these things because the real problem is not out there.
 - vii. The real problem is in here.
 - viii. All of these sins are simply the proof that everyone is under God's judgment, and no one can save themselves.
- c. Ah, but there is one who can.
 - i. Three times in this chapter, Paul says that God handed people over.
 - ii. The Greek word for this is *paredōken*.
 - iii. The next time this word occurs in Romans, we find God handing someone over again, but this time, the one being handed over is his Son Jesus Christ.

Romans 4:25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

- d. God handed Jesus over to death to bear God's just wrath against sin, and then he raised Jesus from the dead to assure us that he really will justify all who will call out for his mercy and put their trust in Jesus as Savior from the wrath of God.
 - i. If you have trusted Jesus and received him as Savior and Lord, you can be sure that God has declared you innocent in his sight and free from his wrath.
 - ii. We cannot keep this hope to ourselves.
 - iii. How could we let our friends and neighbors and loved ones continue to bear this weight without hearing the good news that there is one who has been handed over for them?
- e. Finally, if you are here today and your eyes have been opened to the weight of judgment you bear, cry out to God for his mercy.
 - i. You don't have to suppress the truth anymore.
 - ii. You don't have to believe lies anymore.
 - iii. God is good and full of grace.
 - iv. He is calling you to come to himself.
 - v. He longs for you to admit your sin and find life in Jesus Christ.