

The Wrath of God

This morning I want to turn in the book of Romans to Romans 1, beginning in verse 18 as we continue in this series that I am doing on the “Celebration of the Gospel.” All of this is in preparation for the Summer Harvest and to lay a foundation in this church for why we get involved in evangelism and to, hopefully, encourage you and motivate you. Paul, in Romans 1:18-32, is laying the foundation for his preaching of the gospel. And he starts in verse 18 this way:

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.”

Now, that first little phrase assaults and offends and hurts our modern ears when we start off reading “the wrath of God.” I mean I can’t think of a phrase that is more unmodern, uncongenial to the 90’s and our laid-back 90’s culture than this affront, this assault, “the wrath of God.” Surely it conjures up in your mind a dimly lit church setting in the 1700’s with a grim-faced, stern Puritan preacher wearing a stiff white collar. One who never cracked a smile in his life. The man’s face would break if he smiled or if he showed any genuine warmth or joy. The wrath of God. The whole notion is a throwback, is it not?

At least it feels that way because we have in the church and certainly outside the church evolved, we believe, past any belief in or need for this idea of an angry God or the wrath of God. We hear people all the time saying, “I don’t believe in a God of wrath, I believe in a God of love.” As if the only line in the Bible is “God is love.” Folks are

offended down to our modern roots by discussion of God's anger or God's judgment or hell.

What I am going to try to do here today is to present to you a shockingly different perspective from the perspective and the world's view that we all, including me the proto-typical, New York baby-boomer, was raised with. I am going to talk about the wrath of God. I am going to do so for several reasons. First of all, it's here in the Bible.

I also believe that it is the elimination of any understanding of the wrath of God that has led to the current condition of our modern culture in terms of the lack of moral order, our inability to exercise any discipline in any area, the lack of fear that people have in making bad moral choices. Friends, do you understand that whatever people do to God, they do to themselves? You see, back in the 19th century people said, "We are uncomfortable with the notion of the wrath of God, the anger of God, and the notion that God really exercises any discipline or correction or punishment for sin. We want to get rid of that for Christianity. So we are going to preach the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of men."

What preachers didn't realize is that this elimination of the wrath of God flowed downstream into the way that people related to each other. Pretty soon wrath, anger and discipline in general became unpopular notions, not only when they flowed from God but when they flowed from us. And so we have schools today where teachers cannot any longer discipline children, bring any kind of correction or deal in terms of right or wrong. Having gotten rid of all those notions, we try to reason with disruptive children and counsel past disruption. We find that there is this twist in some children that we cannot deal with because we have gotten rid of any understanding of anger.

And we find within the criminal justice system that without the notion of punishment, without the idea of anger, we don't know what to do with lawbreakers. Because there isn't any real firm confidence that people have done wickedly—no, people have simply been sick or people have had bad environments. There is nothing really evil or really wrong. What right do we have to punish? We don't know what to do with criminals. We don't know how to judge criminals anymore.

And this loss of confidence in right and wrong and moral order has led to the inability on the part of parents to even discipline their own children. So we have homes now being ruled by children who have become tyrants to their parents and schools being ruled by students who have become unruly tyrants to teachers and to principals. And we have the streets in our culture being ruled by thugs who have become tyrants to frighten elderly people and frighten storekeepers and families. And all because we decided to change and get rid of the wrath of God. We have people living without fear of consequence. We have bureaucrats and parents and teachers and employers insecure about pointing out wrongdoing, about saying this is wrong, this needs to stop.

Now, I understand why there has been a massive revolt against the wrath of God. It is because, I think, that we have really misunderstood what the Bible ever only was talking about when it uses this phrase “God's wrath” or “God's anger.” You know, we human beings have life exactly backward and what we almost always do regarding God is we project up to God our own failings, our human faults and frailties. And when one of those failings doesn't look very good on God, we say, “I can't believe that God has that trait, so let's eliminate it.”

Regarding the wrath of God, for example, what people did was they looked at their own family experience of anger, what they grew up with, how anger was practiced

in their homes and said, “Well, if that is what anger is, God could never be angry.” I understand why people get rid of the notion of the wrath of God; it is because we have not ever experienced anger in a healthy, clean way that would be fitting to attach to God who is perfect. Many of you when you look back at your home life, you look at the way your family practiced anger and how discipline was exercised in your home and what you will see is an arbitrariness. Some of you were never quite sure what you were going to be smacked for. It was almost always some irritation that your parents were momentarily experiencing. They experience pressure at their work or pressure from each other, the pressure of a bad marriage, and they took it out on you. It was totally arbitrary. Or it was violent and abusive.

When we speak of the wrath of God, we must never think of arbitrariness. We must never think of abusiveness or unfairness. We must never call to mind some man in your past—father, husband—or some woman—girlfriend, wife, mother, sister—who just flew off the handle and into a rage. The wrath of God is only directed at sin. God is angry only about sin. He is not angry about our looks. He is not angry about the state of the cleanliness of your house. He is not angry because you make mistakes. He is not angry because you got in a little fender bender; because you didn’t perfectly perform on your exam paper; because you goof up, slip up, mess up. None of that provokes the anger of God. The only thing that ever provokes the anger of God is sin. And sin always provokes the anger of God.

God is not only not arbitrary or tyrannical, screaming, yelling and carrying on, God is also not indulgent. Sin, alone, provokes the anger of God and sin always provokes the anger of God. It doesn’t matter how cute we are. But don’t you have a darling looking face? It doesn’t matter how clever we are and how cleverly we can

reason and verbalize our way out of what we have done. It doesn't matter that we are precocious or have a lot of other good qualities. The wrath of God is always directed against sin.

Now, brothers and sisters, as we proceed into this talk, I want you to know that my fundamental belief is that evangelistic urgency is directly tied to this belief in the wrath of God. To the extent a church stops practically believing in God's anger or the possibility of punishment, either now or eternally, to that extent the church will stop evangelizing. If we lose the unpleasant edge of God's character, we lose a major source of motivation to live Christianity.

Let me give you a little illustration. You know why I think that modern Christianity and modern Christians are so apathetic, so unmotivated when it comes to both evangelism and a desire for holiness in our personal life, personal righteousness, I think it is because we have tried to motivate people to live Christian lives and do Christian things based on the benefits, what you will get out of personal righteousness and preaching the gospel, without underlining, from time to time, the costs of what will occur if you don't live righteously. What will happen to you if you don't accept the gospel?

You see, I think that our apathy is directly rooting in the absence of any teaching on the anger of God. Benefits alone do not always motivate us.

Let me explain. I want you to picture an airplane where some of the passengers are given parachutes to wear. When the stewardess hands some of the passengers their parachutes, she says, "I want you to put these parachutes on. They look very attractive with your suit. If you will put them on, you will be much more comfortable on this

flight. You will be able to put your head back and lean on the pack. It will form good support for you on the long flight. It will hold your back nice and straight.”

The passengers put the parachutes on believing that there is going to be all these great benefits accruing to them. Some of the passengers that are wearing the parachutes begin to notice that the parachute cramps their style. It is pretty bulky. Other passengers are looking at them saying, “You look weird with that parachute on.” It is not as comfortable as was previously described. Because there doesn’t appear to be any real need to wear the parachute, a few of the passengers decide to take them off and put them on the floor.

There is a whole other group of passengers who when they are given their parachutes are not just talked to about the benefits of wearing the chutes, but they are told that you need to keep the parachute on because the plane is certainly going to go down and the only way you will escape a fiery, burning death is to leap out of the plane before it crashes. The passengers experience some of the pinch of the parachutes. They experience the stares of fellow passengers who communicate verbally and nonverbally that they are weird for wearing a chute. It is a little uncomfortable. But the ones who are told that they better keep it on, if you want to escape the fire, you better believe they keep the chutes on.

Friends, I believe that the only way you will wear your Christianity and have an urgency about the quest in your life for personal holiness, the need for you to continually pray for and look for opportunities to share this message despite the discomfort, despite the pinch and the stares and everything else is that someone comes along and says, “Hey, part of the reason why you are wearing this parachute is because the plane is going down and this is the only way to escape.” Some folks you talk to will say, “Hey, I have all the

personal peace I need. I don't feel guilty. The benefits are just not enough to compel me to totally give up control of my life to anyone, much less become a Christian.”

The apostle Paul is so anxious to preach the gospel and so celebrates the gospel message, but also because it is the only way to escape the plane going down, the wrath of God. Only in the gospel do we find the answer, the righteousness of God.

Now what I would like to do is to try, from this passage in the Bible, to answer the question: why the wrath of God? We already pointed to an answer: the wrath of God because of sin. But Paul works the argument out in a little more detailed way in verses 18-23. Verses 18-23 is why the wrath of God and verses 24-32 is where the wrath of God. Verses 18-23 are the reason for the wrath of God, the cause of the wrath of God. And then verses 24-32 are where do we see evidence of the wrath of God play out? Paul says the wrath of God is revealed from heaven. Well, where is it revealed? We find that in verses 24-32. This is where you will find the wrath of God revealed.

Let's read verses 18-23:

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.”

What the apostle Paul is doing is actually working out a very tightly reasoned argument. It would not be a really good idea to try to argue logic with the apostle Paul. The apostle Paul was a brilliant man. He was a brilliant logician and his arguments are really often tightly reasoned when he wants them to be.

So step-by-step, he works out an indictment of mankind and shows why God is angry with people. What I would like to do is work his argument out by working back to front. Here is how to understand the wrath of God. Essentially, Paul starts with the evidence for God. Verse 19: What may be known about God is plain because God has made it plain to them. And verse 20: Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen. He starts with evidence for God. His next step is to say that despite the evidence and despite people's knowledge of God, they suppress the evidence.

Verse 18: The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. And verse 21: Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. What he is saying in this second step of the argument is that people take the evidence and suppress it. They pretend that there is no evidence.

In step three, we end up godless and wicked. The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against the godlessness and wickedness of men. Step four is God's wrath rests on godlessness and wickedness.

There is evidence for God. We suppress the evidence. Because we suppress the evidence, we become godless and wicked. And because we are godless and wicked, God's wrath rests on us.

Now, let's work this argument out. The first point in Paul's tightly reasoned argument is there is evidence for God, and specifically, there is evidence for the God of Christianity, the God of the Bible.

Bertrand Russell, the atheist philosopher who was known to change his philosophy of life about every three years. Over the course of Bertrand Russell's life, he wrote over 70 books and lived to age 98. But he regularly shifted ground every few years and came up with a new philosophy of life. Bertrand Russell was once asked: What would you do if when you died, you ended up meeting God? Since you have denied God your whole life, what would you say if you turned out to be wrong and there was a God?

He quickly responded: I would say to God, you didn't give me enough evidence. This is the great defense of modern man against the claim that God wants to assert on our life. How can you hold us responsible to follow Jesus Christ? How can you hold us responsible for what we do with the gospel or your continual urgings toward righteousness, toward obeying the commands, toward a certain kind of life? How can we be held responsible since you didn't give us enough evidence to know that we ought to have followed you? If only it was clearer that you did exist.

God, if only you had presented to us, the jury, a better case, we would have rendered a verdict in your favor. But as it is, you presented us with a weak case and the only thing we could do is pronounce you, God, guilty and us as human beings innocent of responsibility for breaking your laws. We didn't know any better.

You know, recently Marlene and I were walking through the woods at a local park where they had made a wooden walkway as a path through the woods. The walkway consists of planed boards that are nailed down on each end like a boardwalk. You walk along this boardwalk through the woods. All around the boardwalk are fallen

trees. Some of them are very close to the boardwalk and others have fallen in random order around the woods as they blew over, were felled by lightening, or just died and rotted in their place. I said to Marlene as we walked on the boardwalk: How many million years of trees being blown over and dying, being struck by lightening, how many million, billion or trillion years do you think it would take for just random happenings to trees to form this boardwalk that we are walking on that has planed boards with nails on each end?

You know the notion that a boardwalk or even a building could just suddenly happen by being spewed up through random volcanic activity is absolutely preposterous. And yet we look at the human body, the human brain, a baby who feels and thinks and worships and reasons and hopes, we look at the eye that is infinitely more complicated than any boardwalk or wall or building and we regularly say to students in high school or college: You should not reason back from the existence of a human being toward a designer or creator. Oh no, you are just a random happening. You are just a product of evolution.

Paul says that the evidence for God is so plain. It is so overwhelming. It is everywhere you look. You see signs of God's power in nature—lightening, wind, and storms. You see evidence of God's moral nature in the existence of moral laws in every culture, among every group of people. Here is what occurs. People take the evidence and suppress it.

Paul says the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. That word “suppress” means to hold the truth down, to bury the truth, to make sure that the truth never sees the light of day. A good analogy of what Paul is arguing here is that

people are like prosecutors arguing against God. They are saying: God, there is not enough evidence for your existence and on the other hand, as we look at the evidence, the evidence ought to acquit us and get us off guilt free. We should never be judged. We should never experience your wrath.

He says: Okay, prosecutors against God, you have been handed a file. And as you read the file, you have evidence in the file that would acquit you and convict you and convict your family and convict the world. You are reading the files. You see the evidence and you know what you do with the file? You bury it. You make sure that the file never sees the light of day. You claim there is not enough evidence, Jury? The truth is the evidence is overwhelming in favor of your guilt. But you are biased. You came to the trial having already made up your mind that no matter what the evidence said, you were going to decide against God and acquit yourself. There is no amount of evidence that would change your mind because you decided to suppress the truth. You are already biased, you are prejudice against God.

And so step three, when the verdict is rendered, your verdict is godless and unrighteous. Verse 18: The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against the godlessness and wickedness (or unrighteousness) of men who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness. You turn in a verdict in which you say there is no God. That is godlessness. And there is no righteousness. So you say there are no absolutes in morals.

Friends, do you know what godlessness is? It is living as if God doesn't exist. And we all do it. We all live godless lives. Now, I am not saying that we are all atheists, doctrinally, or if you gave us the test that 95% of Americans wouldn't say that God exists, I am saying there are sections of all of our lives where we, from time to time, and moment to moment, pretend and live as if God doesn't exist and as if there were no wrath

for sin. We are practical atheists in zones of our lives, during parts of our day. All of us in some section of our lives or in many sections of our lives play pretend with the evidence and say: For a little while, I am just going to close my eyes and pretend that God doesn't see what I am doing or hear what I am saying. He is not aware of my actions. For a little while I am going to pretend that the moral law of the universe is suspended for me. And this action will not result in any consequences.

All of us cheat on the evidence. We are biased. We are prejudiced. And our verdict is godlessness. To play pretend, that for a little while there is no God. We have gone into a different zone, a zone of godlessness.

I want to say this with all gentleness, but is it not true that you play pretend with God and that I do? That you pretend over and over that God is not going to do anything to you even though you persist in going your own way in a certain area? Even though you opt out from a universe rule by God for a little while in your sex life, regarding your money, regarding forgiving someone, or your anger or a certain addiction. Even though you opt out of a universe rule by God for a little while regarding your recreation or spending habits, your marriage and romantic life. You say: It is okay. It is all right. Do we not all pretend from time to time that God is the biggest fool in the universe? Someone that we can easily out-fox by the simple scheme of saying: I will sin and then I will later ask God's forgiveness. God will forgive me and there will be no consequence whatever. I can keep playing this same ruse with God who is such an enormous fool that he never catches on to my little schemes. That God is like the most elementary chess player who I can keep beating by the most simple opening trap. He just keeps falling into the same thing and says: Oops! I lose. Oops, I lose! Oops! I lose. Oops! I lose.

It must dawn on us that God is not a fool. We must drink into our inner being that God sees through us. That the real God understands our schemes. As the Bible says: He sees through the craftiness of the crafty. There is evidence. We suppress the evidence. As a result of the suppression, we render a verdict of godlessness. And as a result of our playing pretend with God, pretending that we don't see or are not aware of God in a certain area and that God will do nothing, God renders a verdict on us: wrath. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against the godlessness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth.

Well, we never get the last word. The last word is not our pretension that in a certain area God doesn't exist. The last word is the wrath of God unless as we see in a little while, God gives a further word: mercy. But God always gets the last word. He is the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega. God opens the argument and God closes the case and renders the verdict.

Do you understand Paul's indictment? He says you claim ignorance about God. You offer excuses, saying there is not enough evidence. The truth is you, the jury, are biased.

Aldous Huxley, a famous atheist and author of the book *1984*, admitted that the reason why so many intellectuals hold on to an atheistic philosophy is because it supports their desire to be liberated from Christian morals. He said that there is an agenda behind our philosophy. I am quoting from Huxley now: "I had motive for not wanting the world to have a meaning. Consequently, I assumed that it had none and was able, without any difficulty, to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. Most ignorance is culpable ignorance. We don't know because we don't want to know. It is our will that decides how and upon what subjects we shall use our intelligence. Those who detect no meaning

in the world generally do so because for one reason or another it suits their books that the world should be meaningless.”

Now, I don’t think that most of us practical atheists are as forthright as Huxley in admitting that he is biased. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against the bias of people, against our pretension that we are unbiased, against our constant manufacturing of arguments and rationalizations to exclude the Lord of the universe from his universe and to exclude his rightful claim over our lives.

Some years ago, I heard a fascinating psychological interpretation of Romans 1. The philosopher was commenting on the psychology of atheism. What is going on behind atheism, a claim of atheism or our practical, sectioned-off atheism – not letting God into this area of our lives? What is going on mentally, emotionally, psychologically that produces atheism. I thought it fascinating to hear about the psychology of atheism since atheists always accuse Christians of having psychological problems. Atheists are always saying to Christians: Well, you know, friend, the reason why you are a Christian is because you need a psychological crutch. It is because you won’t go through life without projecting on the universe some comforting heavenly father. You can’t bear the thought that there is no heavenly father because you need security and comfort and some answer for the meaninglessness of death.

Well, this philosopher turned the argument around and said: You know, atheist, by your unwillingness to admit the existence of God even though the evidence is so plainly in his favor, you show a psychological and emotional aberration – a neurosis. And he used the categories of trauma, repression and substitution to describe the psychology of the atheist.

Here is the way it works and this is exactly what Paul is saying. First of all, the atheist experiences a trauma. The trauma of seeing your life face to face with a holy God. The trauma of coming fully into the light and being held accountable by someone who is morale. The trauma of being detected.

Do you know what people do when they experience traumas, psychologically? If you don't deal with trauma in a healthy way and come to grips with reality and learn how to process the trauma, what people do is to repress it. So folks who have been sexually abused will often take the memory of that abuse and push it down. People who have gone through terrible wartime experiences will sometimes not want to think about those things and push those memories of war and horror down. People who have been through violent accidents or the experience of criminal violence, rape, will often take those painful things and push them down. They will repress them. Get them out of the conscious mind and put them to the unconscious.

Do you know what happens when you push something into the unconscious? It bubbles to the surface. Sigmund Freud was very much in touch with this notion that stuff that we repress bubbles up. He believed that it bubbled up through slips of the tongue. That you err in using a word inappropriately. Or that it bubbled to the surface in dreams and in nighttime fears. All of the stuff that you have been holding down bubbles to the surface.

Well, so it is with evidence of God. People try to get rid of it. But the truth haunts us. The truth seeks us out. The truth chases us down. The truth corners us. The truth reaches into dark places. The truth comes out in our dreams. In words spoken to us, in words of warning.

And then finally, when people repress long enough what they end up doing is substituting. Instead of dealing with the trauma, it is too painful, they engage in a substitute. A substitute of business, of work; a substitute of drives; a substitute of alcohol; a substitute of sex; a substitute of a new relationship—Paul is saying that is exactly what men and women do. They won't deal with the real God, they push knowledge of God away and then they substitute. Although they claim to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal men and birds and animals and reptiles.

People just come up with their own religions. The real God is too hard to deal with. He is too uncontrollable. He wants to rule our lives. We get rid of the knowledge of him and make religions more to our own liking.

Why the wrath of God? Because of our pretension. Because day by day we lie. Because we are two-faced and hypocritical. We pretend that the world is other than it is. That reality is other than it is and that there are these zones where God isn't. And even if God is, God's character is other than it is—that he doesn't judge; that he doesn't punish; that there aren't consequences for sin.

Now, where is the wrath of God revealed? The apostle Paul says that the wrath of God is being revealed and it is appropriate to ask where. Where do we see evidence of God's anger being shown in this world because of people pretending that God isn't when God is? Where do we see it?

In this passage, we see the wrath of God revealed by God handing people over. Verse 24: Therefore, God gave them over to the sinful desires of their hearts. Verse 26: Because of this God gave them over to shameful lust. Verse 28: Since they didn't think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind.

Do you want to know where you see the wrath of God in this world? It is when God turns someone over to their sin. Friends, this is one of the really insightful things that we can derive from the passage. The wrath of God is revealed precisely in this, that we get turned over to the power of our sins. We fall under the control of our sins, the wrath of God, to use modern language is revealed by our own addictions.

Listen, we often think of God's anger as separated from our sins. Well, you have been involved in sexual immorality, so God is going to show you his wrath by giving you four lashes on the back or bringing about a car accident or giving you some sexual disease. Well, all of those might or might not occur, I don't know, life will deal those out. But Paul doesn't talk about four lashes or a disease or a car accident or losing your health. Paul says that the wrath of God is revealed by us coming progressively under the power of sin.

Verse 24: God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts. Your addictions, my addictions, this country's addictions are an indication of the wrath of God. It is an indication of God deliberately, willfully, abandoning us to what we say we want. When we say: God, I don't want you, I want this other thing and we say it long enough and forcefully enough, God says: Fine, I turn you over to the power of that thing. That is the wrath of God. To not be protected from our lust and the power of addiction. To have God withdraw his hand of preservation, where he holds the power back for a while and allows us to skate in and out. Finally, he says: Fine, I will let you experience the full power of this thing that I have been warning you about to stay away from.

Those of you who are in recovery, you know what a hard, hard taskmaster an addiction is. Alcoholism is a hard taskmaster; so is drug addiction, pornography, eating disorders and workaholism. You don't need anything else to rule over you as

punishment. That substance that you are hooked to, that destructive pattern you repeat over and over in relationships, that twist that you are hooked to that you keep going through something shameful over and over again ritualistically, that is punishment enough.

And one of the things that Paul speaks about being turned over to is, of course, sexual addiction. Verse 26: Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lust, even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way that men also abandon natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversions. I believe that sexual addiction is the mark in every culture of abandoning God. When we leave God, we turn to the most powerful force in this world and worship it, and that force is sex.

Now, Paul is clearly in talking about homosexual practice and lesbian practice in this passage. And I haven't the time to fully discuss a thorough going Christian view of homosexual practice and lesbian practice. I can say that the church does not have a lot to be proud of in its lack of grace and mercy in its ministry to those who are struggling with this practice. I am grateful for some of the really compassionate ministries that have sprung up – both nationally and in this church to help those who are struggling.

But unlike one recent commentator, John Boswell, who wrote a massive defense of homosexuality, I don't believe that Paul was referring to *our* natures when he said that homosexuality is unnatural. According to Boswell, Paul is simply condemning a heterosexual man who works against his own nature by being involved in homosexual practices. But a homosexually oriented man whose nature is homosexual would not be doing anything unnatural and therefore is not condemned.

I don't believe that is what Paul meant. A Jewish writer, as Paul was, in the 1st century simply didn't refer to nature as one's own nature. By nature they meant God's created order. And Jews in the 1st century and really throughout their history were uniform in condemning as a violation of God's created order and God's intention the practice of homosexuality. To be turned over, then, to the practice of homosexuality is a revelation of the wrath of God.

And finally to be handed over to total moral confusion is a revelation of the wrath of God. Verse 28: Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind to do what ought not to be done. If you want to see evidence of the wrath of God, you simply need to look at the chaos and disorder in current society. That shows the wrath of God. When people say to God: Get out of our lives—life falls apart. Life does not do well without God.

And, friends, wherever you push God out, you are not going to do well. When God is pushed out of your marriage and you really haven't invited God to be in the very center of your marriage, to that extent your marriage is not going to do well. If you push God out of your dating relationship and say: I am not going to listen to what God thinks about who I am dating or how I am dating or what I am doing when I am dating. To that extent, that area of your life is going to be disordered and have problems. If you push God out of your work and your business practices, that area is going to fall to the ground.

Understand that the current moral confusion that we are experiencing—all of the chaos and disorder in society is the result of God turning us over to what we claim we want. A world without God. See, we have pretended that men and women would be involved in this upward spiral as we threw Christianity off. That we would be evolving and becoming better, higher and freer and more tolerant. Paul says that when you throw

God out, when you push God to the edges of your life and try to order the center of life yourself, you don't spiral up, you spiral down. It is not evolution that you engage in, it is devolution. It is degeneration. We become more debased as we walk away from God. We become more degraded. The whole pattern Paul is showing is a pattern down, a spiral down.

And the only reason why we are not thoroughly debased is because people have not yet totally abandoned Christianity. Even those who verbally attack Christ and verbally attack God, they don't do so in the way they order their private lives completely. If they did, their lives would totally fall to the ground.

Let me give you a little illustration. There is a wonderful Christian philosopher who spoke at OSU a year or so again named Ravi Zacharias. But he was at OSU and they showed him the Wexner Center for the Performing Arts, which is a monument to deconstructivism. If you have ever seen the building, it has no straight lines in it. It is filled with confusing angles. The floors aren't straight. The walls aren't straight. The stairways are just hanging in the air. And one man was showing Dr. Zacharias around and said, "Isn't this wonderful? It is a testimony to the fact that we don't need absolute truth and we can build a building where lines are zigzagged."

Dr. Zacharias looked around at the crazy angles of all the walls and said, "Let me ask you one question. Did you build the foundation the same way you built this building?"

See, the truth is that they built the foundation according to the laws of physics. They smuggled into the building very traditional principles regarding foundation laying and that is the only reason the building is standing.

Many people smuggle into their lives very traditional principles of Christian morality all the while constructing a crazy building without lines. But you know, in America right now, even the foundation is being eroded.

And so, in our sexuality, in our addictions and in all of the chaos and moral confusion of our time, we are seeing the wrath of God being revealed from heaven. Paul wrote this letter to the Romans and preached his gospel with urgency because he believed that there was a way for us to escape the wrath of God. He believed in an individual's life the last word didn't have to be wrath. The last word for you and me could be the mercy of God.