

Three Giant Steps into God's Wrath

Key Verse: *They exchanged the **truth about God** for the lie and **worshiped** and **served** the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen (Romans 1:25)*

We'll see humanity's **three giant steps** away from God and into *paganism* in theology, spirituality and sexuality. Paul is thinking first in Romans about the Gentile world. He will later address the Jews. Last week we ended with "the righteousness of God revealed" (righteousness offered to us in the gospel).¹ Now we see the wrath of God "revealed." What happens when foolish, dark hearts refuse to acknowledge, thank and glorify God the Creator?

Theology: A Truth Exchange

Theology: What we believe about God and who he is (vv 18–20)

God's Wrath Revealed from Heaven

How is God's wrath revealed? God is not descending in judgment. We are not burned up by his hot anger. As the passage builds to its sad conclusion, we'll see God's wrath "made manifest."

God's Qualities Revealed in the Creation

His Power

All of us sense this. Religions all over the world try to placate the anger of God. The power of Dorian (as if a bomb went off) or of fire, thunder, an avalanche, a tsunami

His Divine Nature

Yet there is also something personal, intimate, tender, and beautiful "out there."

- We sense his transcendence in the rainbow, the clouds, a sunset.
- We sense his intimacy in a newborn baby, a tender look, a smile
- We sense his creativity in the variety of animals and the creativity of human beings.
- We sense his beauty in a sunset, a hummingbird, a glorious flower, a moving song.
- We sense his unity/diversity in the interdependence of nature, of the creatures, of a family.
- Human beings show off God's nature best in their capacity for language, love, music, art, cooking, writing, sports, science, and so on!

God made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face o the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him...Yet he is actually not far from each one of us....He commands all people everywhere to repent...(Acts 17:26–27, 30)

Knowledge Suppressed

We restrain, hold back, keep at bay, suppress that knowledge. Our knowledge of God comes to all of us from what we see around us, outside of us; what he has created. We don't have an inherent knowledge of God that just naturally wells up within us. But the fact that God shows it *to us* also causes us to know it *in us*. God created us to react to what he has created.

^{ASV} **Romans 1:19** because that which is known of God is manifest **in them**; for God manifested it **unto them**.

^{NIV} **Psalm 19:1–3** The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.

Psalm 8:3-9 ³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

It is our unrighteous nature that makes us unwilling and rebellious. We do not want a master.

Men had the knowledge of God available to them but “did not like to retain God in their knowledge” (verse 28). The truth was accessible to them, but they suppressed it unrighteously and embraced “the lie” in preference to it. (Bruce, 82–83)

Without Excuse

Paul concludes that all men are without excuse. These “**invisible**” characteristics (eternal power, divine nature) are clearly **seen** and **understood** (by sight and intelligence).

Both the verbs...describe how, on contemplating God’s works, man can grasp enough of His nature to prevent him from the error of identifying any of the created things with the Creator. (Bruce, 84, quoting Gärtner, 137)

They **exchanged the truth about God for the lie** and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator (25)

Giant Step 1

Into “Oneism”: failing to distinguish between God and his Creation. All Is One

Spirituality: A Worship Exchange

What or whom we worship.

Verses 21-23

Did not honor; did not thank; futile thoughts; foolish hearts

Ephesians 4:17–19 ...You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

Result: Worship of Creation

They **exchanged the glory of God for images** (v 23)

^{ESV} **Acts 7:42** But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: "' Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.' Acts 7:42–43

God put into all of us the need of and desire to thank, praise and honor – to worship. Whom do we thank? Whom should we honor? To whom can we pray? When praise rises in our hearts, to whom to we offer it? We also have a pressing need to confess, but *to whom* should we confess?

They **exchanged** the truth about God for the lie and **worshiped** and served the creature rather than the Creator (25)

Giant Step 2 Into Oneism: Failing to Distinguish between worshiping God and Worshiping his creation.

Sexuality: A Sex/Gender Exchange

What will we serve, and how?

Verses 24–28

For this reason, **God gave them over** to impurity (24)

We get a description of what those “dishonorable passions” are:

They **exchanged** natural (created) relations (both male and female) **for unnatural ones**.

v. 26 YLT “*for even their females did change the natural use into that against nature*”

v. 27 YLT “*males with males working shame*”

Why does God pick this sin? Because it is a physical picture of blurring all distinctions. God made things “holy,” “set apart,” “distinct.” The days are distinct. Individuals are distinct. Roles are distinct. In the Old Testament even dishes and spoons are “holy” because they are “set apart” for a special purpose. God knit marriage into his creation to give us a picture of his love for the church. Marriage is a very physical and spiritual reflection of who God is. Pagan thinkers understand this link between what we believe about God and what we believe about men and women.

Pagan thinker June Singer says that “androgyny (merging male and female) is the sacrament of monism [Oneism].” Think of the communion table. We call it a sacrament because it is a physical picture of a holy truth. Homosexuality is a physical representation of the unholy blending of God’s created distinctions. It is a way of refusing God the Creator.

*They **exchanged** the truth about God for the lie and worshiped and **served** the creature rather than the Creator Therefore **God gave them over** to dishonorable passions (25–6)*

Giant Step 3

Into Oneism: Destroying God’s created distinctions between Male and Female

Results of Serving Creation and Living the Lie

Verses 29-32

God gave them over to a debased (disapproved) mind.

v. 28 YLT *And, according as they did not **approve** of having God in knowledge, God gave them up to a **disapproved** mind, to do the things not seemly*

Jude 1:10 *these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively.*

This leads right back to the beginning ...they did not acknowledge him (see vv 21–22)

Bad Theology leads to **Bad Worship** which leads to **Bad Sexuality** and to a cursed and miserable life:

Romans 1:29–31 YLT having been filled with all unrighteousness, whoredom, wickedness, covetousness, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil dispositions; whisperers, evil-speakers, God-haters, insulting, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, unintelligent, faithless, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.

We end up not only doing such things, but approving and encouraging those who do them. God's wrath is made manifest in the wicked actions and plans that unbelievers not only *do* but enthusiastically *encourage*. **God gives them over.** By exercising their own desires without God's restraining hand, they are experiencing, even now, the wrath of God. Rampant suicide, depression, aggressive behavior, shootings, rape and so on.

Open Your Eyes

*The lost enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enslaved.*² C. S. Lewis

Our Hope: One Last Giving Over

^{ESV} **Romans 8:32** *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

This is our only hope! But what a hope it is!!!

We are soaked in the same unrighteousness as that described in this text. How often have we taken the glory instead of glorifying God? How often have we erected our own opinions and gifts over those of others? Is there one day, one hour, one minute when we have been fully thankful, fully joyful, fully committed to honoring, serving and loving our God and Savior with all our heart, soul, strength and mind? NO, NO, NO!

And yet – God did not spare his Son but **GAVE HIM OVER** for us.

This is what the book of Romans will tell us about. But the Apostle Paul knew that we could not absorb God's grace properly until we know the true state of our rebellion.

¹“The fact of antithesis shows unmistakably, if any confirmation were needed, that “the righteousness of God’ (vs. 17) is not the attribute of justice but the righteousness provided in the gospel to meet the need of which the wrath of God is the manifestation. The justice of God being retributive in reference to sin would not be the provision for escape from wrath.” John Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1: The New International Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 35.

² Lewis, C. S., *The Problem of Pain* (1940), 115, cited in F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 84.