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ROMANS 1:18-32

Romans Series: How God Changes People

Please open your Bibles to Romans 1:18-32. Let's pray together as we open God's word.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we are so grateful for the Bible because we know that it becomes our authority in our lives. You've given us direction through your word to know who you are, to know who we are, and to know and understand the plan that you have for us. Lord, we know that as we come to your word some of the things that we experience are not easy things. Some of them are challenging, you touch us in areas of sensitivity in our lives. So I'm asking now today that you'd give us humility as we go to your word, recognizing that you are God and we are not, and that we need to trust in you and rely on you. Lord, teach us today through your word. But not just teach our heads; teach our hearts. Convict us. Give us a passion for serving you and loving you and knowing you more. I ask that your Holy Spirit today would be the teacher in each of our hearts as we look at your word. In Jesus' name, amen.

We are studying the book of Romans. The book of Romans is a book that outlines for us the salvation message. So it's a theological book, unlike some of the other books that are dealing with a problem. 1 Corinthians is dealing with a problem as Paul is writing to them. Galatians is dealing with a problem. But in the book of Romans we have a theological treatise on salvation and what it is. So we can learn a lot about it.

I want you to turn with me to verse 18. We're going verse by verse through the book of Romans. So after we're done today at verse 32, we'll pick up next week at Romans 2 and so on as we go through the book so that we're covering everything that God would have for us in this particular book of the Bible.

If you look in your Bibles to Romans 1:17 it says that *through the gospel righteousness is being revealed*. It's passive. It's *being revealed*. The gospel reveals righteousness and it describes a little bit about that in verse 17. We'll learn more about it as we go into chapters 4 and 5 of Romans. But I want you to see that *righteousness of God is being revealed*.

Now we look at verse 18. That's where we're going to pick up today. *The wrath of God is being revealed*. It's not enough to just see the righteousness of God; we also see the wrath of God. I'll make some comments about that in a moment. *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness*.

Let's first talk about the wrath of God and what it is. We have to understand this because I think in our own lives we have this understanding of our own anger and sometimes we imagine that must be what God's anger is like. In our own lives we often get impulsive, infuriated. Our emotions overcome our ability to think and we act rashly. That's not the same kind of wrath of God that we're talking about here. The reason that happens in us is because our emotions take place in a human body. And a human body is often how we respond to our emotions.

But when the wrath of God is described, it's only similar in one way and that is that it's a response to some problem that's out there. Our anger, when we get angry as individuals it's because something is wrong. Sometimes the something wrong is out there. Sometimes the something wrong is being mean to somebody. One son is being mean to another, and so you're angry about it. Or sometimes something's wrong inside where "I expected to be left alone and you're bothering me here!" Sometimes there's demandingness inside of our own hearts. Something's wrong, provoking the anger.

The same thing is true with God. When someone violates the standard that God has set up, we call that sin and there's this response that's consistent. It's not impulsive. It's a consistent tidal wave of emotional response to sin that comes whenever sin is present. It's not impulsive, it's not illogical; it's a consistent response to sin. When sin comes into contact with a perfectly righteous God, you have a reaction. It's a reaction called the wrath of God. That's what we see.

The times that we don't experience the wrath of God is when it's been taken care of in one way or another – through God's mercy or God's grace. The gospel story continues and we realize in the gospel that Jesus Christ died on the cross to take away the wrath of God so that we can experience the love of God. That's the beauty of the gospel message and we'll continue to develop that over the coming weeks. We don't experience the wrath of God when we've trusted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior because judicially that wrath has been taken care of.

Now I want to look at another part of this verse where it says at the end it's talking about the godless, the wicked person. It talks about us as people. It says *who suppress the truth by their wickedness*. They *suppress the truth*. The implication is there that the truth is there. In every one of us the truth about God is present in our hearts and God is drawing us to Himself. The truth is there and in order for us to go our own way, do our own thing, we have to suppress that truth. But it's still there.

This is what makes the gospel message easier to share than trying to sell someone on some product or something else. Okay? Because inside of the person there's already a God-shaped hole that needs to be filled. And people try to fill it in all kinds of different ways. And so when you appeal to someone and you talk to them about the gospel, many people are ready to receive that message and say, "That is it. It rings true to me" because God has placed truth in them. I need that truth. I need it.

Now sometimes many people don't have it yet. They don't know it, so when you share the gospel of Jesus Christ, the message of salvation with someone, it rings true for them and they say, "I want it." But in this case a person who is doing the wrong thing has to suppress that truth by their evil deeds or by their wickedness.

There aren't multiple truths. There's one truth because God created us. He created all of us and He created us with this drawing truth inside of us so that when it's there it's available and it meets the need that's inside.

I just want to share that with you because as you go out and you share the gospel with people, you do not have to save people. God saves people. We just present the message. Because the message rings true in people's lives. People need to hear the message of the gospel, and when they hear it, it rings true for them.

So they 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 people are without excuse.

There's something inside of every person that says that they know there's a God.

Verse 20 says, *being understood from what has been made*. That's the word *poema* or any word, something that's been created. At the Franklin Institute this week, I watched a display about how the world has been evolving for six billion years. Amazing to watch this. But the whole idea of evolution is an alternative to understanding that God exists.

If you don't believe God exists, you've got to figure out some way to describe how this world came to me. Because we have a world. And if it wasn't created by a creator, then you've got to find some humanistic way or some natural way in which it comes about. So there's an attempt through evolution to find an alternative to God. Because if I can get rid of God as the designer, God as the creator of me, then I really don't have to listen to what He has to say. I don't have to obey Him. I don't have to abide by His guidelines or anything else.

Psalms 19 in the Old Testament says something similar to this. In Psalm 19:1-4 it says, *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 reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.*

There's a beacon. Just by looking at creation. You can look at any one of the sciences.

If you look at geology and you start studying dirt and you start studying rocks, you go, "Whoa. There's a designer here."

If you study biology, the study of life, you start learning about these things and you go, "Wow. This is complicated."

If you study medicine, you start seeing all kinds of things that are just fascinating.

If you study botany it's just very interesting and intriguing. There's a creator behind this.

If you're studying astronomy and you see the hugeness of the galaxies, there's a creator behind this. It's just amazing.

And that's the message here that's being talked about in Psalm 19. A message that God exists, that God is a designer. And then we receive the more specific message that God wants to have a personal relationship with us.

Let's go on to verse 21 in Romans 1. *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.*

This is what happens when you suppress the truth. When you suppress the truth the heart becomes darkened in that area. It's like a putting a dark blanket over that witness that's inside of the heart that says there's a God. He's powerful. Both the witness that's out there and we're going to read later, not this week, but we'll read about the conscience. So it's inside that's drawing us.

Their thinking became futile. So the logic of it all gets thrown out the window. That's what happens when the truth is suppressed. I would suggest all of us need to be careful about that. God's truth stands firm and it would be better for us to allow God to conform us to Jesus Christ and the model of Jesus Christ.

Verse 22 continues the thought. *Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.*

So you can see that God made us, designed us in our hearts to worship Him. That's His design. When you suppress that, you cover over the God-shaped hole with this darkness in your heart then you're left still with the need to worship. Our hearts need to worship something. So you end up worshipping something. You can worship a job, you can worship money, you can worship family, you can worship a hobby. You can worship all kinds of things. But God designed our hearts to worship.

In particular it's going to talk about the desire for sex. I want you to understand this. God designed sex to be a spiritual activity, but our world tries to separate the spiritual from the biological to imagine that they are not connected. God created sex to be this spiritual union between a husband and wife.

In order to illustrate this we're stepping out of Romans for a moment.

In 1 Corinthians 6 it says, *Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples.*] All of a sudden talking about the Holy Spirit in our bodies.

You see God has designed sex. Paul's talking in 1 Corinthians about how the Holy Spirit resides in our bodies. *You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.* It's not just a biological act.

Here's another passage in 1 Corinthians 7. *The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife.*

When I'm doing marriage counseling or premarital counseling I pull this passage out and I remind people that sex is a ministry. So that your default answer is "yes." If your partner, your husband or your wife, says, "Can we have sex?" your answer should be "yes." Not "well let's see. Do I feel like it?" That's not the question. "Am I in the mood?" That's not the question. The answer is "yes." It's a ministry that you have.

Notice it says, *Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer.* Wait a minute. We were talking about sex, now we're talking about prayer. Why? Because prayer and sex have a similarities. They are spiritual

Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. So I just want you to see, I think it's important for us to understand, contrary to the world's understanding, that sex is a spiritual activity designed by God between a husband and a wife.

Now go with me back to Romans 1:24. We've come to this place where we see that they've cloaked over their hearts. There's a darkness over the God desire, the desire to serve God and please Him. There is the futility of their thinking, so their thinking is repressed. They're suppressing the truth and they're not thinking logically now. Now they're thinking with their passions or their desires.

That's why it says in verse 24, *Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity (that's heterosexual) for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged (now get this, there's an exchange they gave up) and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised* And so sex becomes one of those desires and people go after that regularly.

The greatest thing that can happen is that you grow old with a person you've been faithful to. There's a spiritual union that takes place that's beautiful there. It's a gift. Young people, I just want to tell you. It is a gift when you save your body for the person you're going to marry so that when you get married what you're sharing with that person is a gift. It's a spiritual gift you give them, not just a biological act. But if you're driven by desires then you get what we have today.

In 2013 nationwide, 15% of high school students reported already having four or more sexual partners. Sex becomes this desire that goes rampant. If you try to separate sex from its design then it becomes this biological thing. And like animals you can just have sex wherever you want. Desire triumphs over truth.

So in the first passage, verse 24 is talking about heterosexual problem. It's a sin against God.

Starting in verse 26 we're going to talk about homosexual sex. It is not only a violation against God, it's a violation against nature. We'll read the verses and then we'll talk about it.

Verse 26 – *Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts (those are desires, shameful desires). Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

Alright. Let's just pause for a moment because I'm about to talk about homosexuality and this is a challenge, I think, for our culture. It's a challenge because in our culture there's a desire to, a pressure for us all to view homosexuality as normal. But it's not only in our culture, there are many of you and me that have friends who are gay or lesbian, many of us who have family members that are gay or lesbian.

The same is true in verse 27. *In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations* has the idea it's against nature. When we're talking about heterosexual sin, a spiritual violation of God when we do it.

In this condition that's against God, we're talking about a violation with nature (lust and desires). But a logical person could look at this and say the plumbing doesn't match. When two men get together, the plumbing doesn't work. It's against nature. God designed a man and a woman to come together in sexual unity. So when you try to do that, it's not logical.

So you can see there it says they burned, *inflamed with lust*. So again, it's the desire, not the logic that they're using in order to come to this thing.

Now I want to clarify several points about homosexuality from this passage that I think will be helpful for you.

Number one, God condemns homosexuality and the person who engages in homosexual activity is in sin. However, the person who is tempted is not in sin. That's temptation. There's a distinction because the desire itself is a temptation, that desire is not necessarily wrong. I mean, temptation is different than acting it out.

It's about what is right and what is wrong according to God's standard. Every one of us are tempted in certain ways. There are passions that we wish we could go after. In fact, there's a godliness that takes place when anyone who's tempted to go somewhere, the same way in a person who's tempted to act out in a homosexual way. We are all tempted. So a resisting of temptation of any kind is a demonstration of godliness.

There are some practicing homosexuals who will make the statement, think they're thinking according to God's word. I want to help you understand why. Because sometimes homosexuals will say It's "unfair to ask me not to act out in this way." That line of thinking is wrong. It's an

argument that's thrown around today. "I've been made this way." That's one of the first things you're going to hear. "Don't challenge the fact that I have these desires. I've had them since birth," or whatever.

Here's what I want to say. Desire isn't a legitimate reason for practicing it. We all are born with tendencies.

Let me help you understand what the sin nature is. The sin nature is a tendency. All of us are born with a sin nature, so it's not wrong to suggest that someone is born with a desire. Some people, I'm convinced, are born with a tendency to pyromania. They're born that way. There are some people who are born with a tendency toward dishonesty. A tendency does not make it right. Homosexuality is wrong.

This is not the only passage that deals with this subject. In Leviticus 18:22 it says, *Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman. If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable.*

We are not living in Old Testament times. We are not killing people who are homosexuals. Okay? We aren't killing those who are disobedient to their parents, as was the case in the Old Testament either.

Some people say, "Well that's the Old Testament. What about the New Testament?" Let me point out in the New Testament we have a reference to this story in Genesis 19 where God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. The final straw was the homosexuality that they were engaged in. And so in Jude, referring back to that, it says, *In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.* The idea here in the New Testament is the same thing, that it's sin.

In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 we have a list of sins. This is important. Because if you're singling out homosexuality as some bigger sin than something else, then that's a problem. It is in a sin list of other things. All I want you to see is that it's in the sin list. But let's not make it bigger than any other sin.

Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters (that's heterosexual sin) nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Look at the next statement. Is that the cure for these desires that we have, the cure for acting out is to resist temptation and trust Jesus Christ as Savior. You've come out of that, he's saying to them in the Corinthian church. You've come out of that. You no longer are that.

And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. Wow.

Here's another list. Now there's a number of sin lists in the Bible. There's the nasty nine and the evil eight and the dirty dozen and there's all these kinds of sin lists. Again, the point is it's on the list. You need to see in the New Testament we also have homosexuality as a sin listed here.

In 1 Timothy 1:9-10 – *We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else.* You need to understand that God takes a stand against homosexuality. It is wrong.

Sometimes homosexuals believe that they are being picked on by Christians. But if we are being pressured to accept something that is sinful as natural and normal, we take a stand against that. Homosexuality is like any other sin.

Then notice verse 28. *Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. And here's some things that are on the list. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.*

Young people, you've got to think about this. We're talking about evil things here and then all of a sudden they throw in disobeying parents. The point is here, once you start going down this path and you darken in your heart, what can you take a stand against? You have now made anything available. Anything goes at this point.

Now verse 32 in our passage is an important verse because there's sometimes people will say, "Oh I wouldn't do that, but I want to affirm the right of someone who is different than me and who wants to do something different. I want to make sure they have the right to do their own thing." Be careful about that, according to Romans 1:32. *Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

In some respects today we've singled out this one sin of homosexuality. We have a challenge here and so it is something that I think is important for us to talk about. The bigger issue is about salvation for Jesus Christ. That is the most important thing.

I do believe that some people will come to their conclusion in their own hearts, and righteously so, that they might go to a wedding of a friend or a coworker or a family member who's gay. Or there are some who might justifiably say, "No, I'm not going there because I believe that's wrong." That decision is left up to the individual to decide what is best.

But the primary goal for either of them is the same. The goal is to build relationship with them so we can introduce them to Jesus Christ and the truths that Jesus Christ offer because the real benefit of any person is that the blinders come off, the darkness comes out of the heart. The

person is able to address the hole inside so that they can have freedom on the inside from any kind of problem.

Be careful that you don't enter into a pool of self-pity and say, "I was born with this and I've got to deal with this all the time." I want to say we all have struggles, we all have passions, we all have the desire to do the wrong thing. Every one of need to understand who God is, to accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

In the book of Romans we're going to see how God changes people. Salvation is a piece of that because God empowers us to do what's right. It's just a fascinating thing when we take the plunge and then see what change happens inside someone's heart.

If you're here today, and this just happens to be in our passage, that's where we are. We just talk about whatever we're coming salvation. If you're here today and you've never trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I want to encourage you to make that decision today. Say, "I want Jesus Christ in my life." And when you do, God will come into your heart. He'll illumine your heart in some ways that will open up tremendous freedom. It starts, as we said, at the beginning, recognizing that I'm a sinner and I need a Savior.

If God is bringing you to that conclusion in your heart today, then we're going to sing a song, and as we sing this next song I'm going to invite you to go to the side. We have prayer counselors on the side and they will pray with you and help you get connected to the God who created you in that very personal way. Would you stand with me? And let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, we come before you acknowledging our weakness. There are some folks here today who are enslaved by various things – enslaved by anger or pornography, enslaved by desires that are getting them off track. Lord, you know the solution and you want us to have that solution to break those bonds that hinder our freedom. We ask that in the name of Jesus you would provide that healing for people today. Lord, we acknowledge who you are and we're grateful for your name, the name that represents so much to us. We take that on as Christians, little Christs, and we ask that you would empower us with your Spirit to be the people that you want us to be. We pray this in Jesus name, amen.