When God Let’s Go
Romans 1:18–32

Introduction: Recent American Tragedies

• There have been several things that have happened in the last six months in our country that have left many Christians scratching their head, saying, “This just doesn’t make any sense.” You know what I’m talking about, two main things in particular . . .

• On June 26th of this year, the Supreme Court made their final ruling on gay marriage, saying that individual states could not keep same-sex couples from marrying and they must recognize their unions. I’m not even going to talk about the outrage by many in the national government stepping over state lines, demanding what a state must do (this is not the issue the Christian needs to stand upon). This is a moral issue, which is rapidly becoming the majority view in our nation. According to a recent poll, 55% of Americans are now in favor of same-sex marriage. This is up from 35% in 2001. Interestingly enough, those opposing same-sex marriage has dropped from 57% in 2001 to 39% in 2015.¹

• And so how should the Christian, who believes the Bible is the revealed authority for life, respond to this sort of situation? Many are shocked at what is happening. But should we be shocked? And what should we be shocked at, that a pagan land proposes pagan things? Or that churches that claim the name of Jesus cave to the pressures of modern day Babylon? And honestly, should it surprise us when evangelicals who don’t regularly preach the Bible or the gospel change their stance on this issue? What should our response be to an organization like Hillsong, who while they may write some good songs, promotes a prosperity gospel and now openly allows those living in same-sex relationships into full membership of their church? Surprise? Shock? Depression?

• Or let’s look at another issue. Just a little over a month ago, the Center for Medical Progress began releasing a series of undercover videos examining Planned Parenthood and their involvement in harvesting organs and tissues from the bodies of aborted fetuses, which they apparently have been selling.² I hope you have been following this and are helping to promote the ugliness of this

² For summary information on the Planned Parenthood Videos, please see: [http://americamagazine.org/content/all-things/planned-parenthood-videos-what-you-need-know#timeline](http://americamagazine.org/content/all-things/planned-parenthood-videos-what-you-need-know#timeline)
organization and what they are doing. But should we be surprised? Honestly, why are we surprised when an organization known for the termination of babies in the womb of women are trying to profit from the selling of the aborted body parts?

- So how should the Christian respond? And what should outrage us more, the fact that they are doing these things, or the fact that no matter how outrageous these videos are, many in our nation simply turn a blind eye to them? I mean, honestly, we see what is happening and it just doesn’t make any sense. We are astonished that those endorsing these things think what they are doing is okay. But maybe we should be more shocked that these video’s get buried in the mainline news; that they are not the first things everyone is talking about. One blogger, talking about this issue, said . . .

“Of course, the media hasn’t helped matters. If you rely on mainstream ‘journalists’ for your information, you probably didn’t hear a single word about the most recent footage, even though it contains blockbuster, earth-shattering news. You’ve likely been inundated with stories about Donald Trump and maybe Hillary Clinton, but not the continued wholesale slaughter and sale of infants. Social media hasn’t been any better. Yesterday, several hours after the video was released, here were the top trending headlines on Twitter:

- ‘Jared Fogle to plead guilty to underage sex, child porn’
- ‘Did Shawn King mislead Oprah about his race?’
- ‘Deez Nuts joins 2016 presidential race’
- ‘50 crazy things photographers do to get the perfect shot’
- ‘Megan Fox and Brian Austin Green split after 11 years together’
- ‘Dolphins safety carted off field with ACL injury’

Conspicuously, out of the top 20 hot topics, none of them had anything to do with a billion dollar conglomerate ripping the brains out of children’s heads.”

And so when it comes to these mainstream social ills of our culture today, how should the Christian respond? Is there an explanation for the way our society is acting? Can we explain why something that seems so obvious is completely missed? I think we can. I believe Romans 1 gives us the answer. I believe it is here that we will find some hope. It’s going to take us a few weeks to get to the final answers.

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3 http://www.theblaze.com/contributions/if-you-still-support-planned-parenthood-you-are-simply-not-a-decent-person/
for these questions, so I hope you will track with me as we attempt to get there. But as we jump into this text, I want to read it together . . .

📖 Romans 1:18–32 [read]

As in most texts of Scripture, there is a flow to the argument the Apostle Paul is trying to make. And I want to help show you the flow over the next couple of weeks. But there is a theme I want to show you at the very beginning. This is one theme that we will see over and over throughout this passage.

**Main Theme: We Should Never Underestimate Where The Rejection of God’s Truth Will Lead Us!**

This section of Scripture is the picture of mankind when they reject God’s truth and He finally gives them what they want. He no longer restrains them by His grace and let’s them go after their sinful desires. And when this happens, there’s no bottom to the level of morality mankind may invent. We may think we have reached the bottom of morality, but there’s always a next step of moral depravity when people suppress God’s truth! Friends, the most depressing news I have for you is that we are not at the bottom of this moral barrel. This is what Paul tells us in this passage.

As we study this passage, there are a few places we are going to go really quick over and some we are going to camp for extended periods of time. But my goal in walking through this may be a little different than our main Sunday morning preaching times. I want to show you how things fit together and to understand the flow of the argument Paul is trying to make. So, there may be some times we get more technical than normal. So don’t be afraid to ask questions.

Two more things before we jump too far into this. Let’s resist the temptation to make this entire study all about “them out there.” When we do this, we begin the slow fade of losing our own sin-consciousness, and find ourselves on the precipice of rejecting the truth God has given us. As well, there’s not much here in this passage that makes us smile. There’s not much here to laugh at. There’s a lot of darkness in this passage. But let’s remember that this is a description of the “now present depravity of mankind.” This is not a description of the finality of the damned. Jesus did come to seek and save the lost that are described in this passage. Many who are described in this passage are also described in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, which speaks of those who
will not inherit the Kingdom of God. But it ends very preciously as we are told . . .

\textit{1 Corinthians 6:11, “And such were some of you; 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.”}

With all of that in our minds, let’s jump in to see how Paul describes where the rejection of God’s truth will lead a person . . .

\textbf{Vs. 18–20} \textit{If someone believes in God, what character qualities do you think they believe are dominant? Love. Mercy. Grace. It’s hard to argue against these, as God is a God of love, mercy, and grace. Praise Him for that. How many people do you think are also quick to describe Him how Paul describes Him in vs. 18 . . . as a God who is revealing His wrath from heaven against all ungodliness? Probably not many. And if you meet them, they are probably not the type of people you want to hang around.}

But there is a reality that one of the character qualities of God is His wrath. Not just love, but wrath. We tend to think one or the other, but for God, He can be both at the same time. We may not like the idea of His wrath because we have a wrong idea of what anger or wrath is. We see it only through the lens of our human anger, which is hardly ever good. But God is not like man.

There are two words for wrath in the NT that Paul could have used. One is the word “\textit{thumos},” from which we get thermos or thermometer. It is a term used to describe red-hot anger. The other word is “\textit{orge}” and is a settled, abiding, condition of controlled anger. I’m sure you can guess which word Paul uses here. The wrath described here by God is not a quick-tempered, revenge-filled, unrestrained emotional response to something someone does. God’s wrath is His level-headed, righteous, controlled response to sin. He does not lose His temper. It is not irrational rage, but a calm response by a holy God toward unholiness.

Paul says that this wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. To reveal has the basic idea of uncovering or bringing to light; to make known. It is the idea that God’s wrath, His righteous controlled response to sin is being done continually. It is in the present tense, meaning it is happening right now. I think this is very important. This is not necessarily talking about
eternal judgment, which is real and we can’t forget about it in the back of our minds. God’s final wrath will be revealed at some point in time. But Paul is saying that God’s wrath is currently being revealed.

What is the wrath? Where do we see it? In the late 80s, some people said that the HIV virus was God’s wrath toward those with a faulty sexual ethic. At the turn of the Millennium, there were some who said 9/11 was the wrath of God poured out on our nation. I’m in no situation to know the mind of God in these things, so I don’t want to say either way. So what is it? I think we will see in the context that His wrath is the allowing us further plight into the sin that we keep running after. But hold that thought, because we are getting ahead of ourselves.

By the way, Paul does say that God’s wrath is revealed from heaven, the place where He is. God is not ignorant of what is happening here on earth. Everything that happens is visible to the all-seeing eye of God.

Where is His wrath targeted? All ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Ungodliness is the sin of not reverencing God. It has to do with a lack of devotion for, reverence to, and worship of God. It is the total disregard for God. It is a failure that ultimately will lead to some form of false worship. Unrighteousness is the sin of not reverencing His ordinances, His holy law. Obviously these two terms go together. Ungodliness leads to unrighteousness. When we live contrary to His ways, we begin to get a distaste for His revelation. As I heard one many say earlier this year at a conference, “Ungodliness leads to heresy.” It’s so true. When we disobey, we begin to hate the revelation that is telling us that we are disobeying.

This unrighteousness moves them to suppress the Truth of God. It is their love for their unrighteous lifestyle that moves people to reject God’s Law; His Truth. They refuse to live according to the light given to them. They ignore His Truth. And this suppression in vs. 18 is active. Not passive. One commentator, R.C.H. Lenski said,

“Whenever the truth starts to exert itself and makes them feel uneasy in their moral nature, they hold it down, suppress it. Some drown its voice by rushing into their immoralities; others strangle the disturbing voice by argument and by denial.”

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This is where we begin to see our main idea: **WE SHOULD NEVER UNDERESTIMATE WHERE THE REJECTION OF GOD’S TRUTH WILL LEAD YOU!** When someone is engaging in ungodly activity, it becomes easy for them to do things to suppress the truth of God in their life, leading to further ungodliness and the further hardening of their conscious. As Lenski said, some actively do this by throwing themselves further and further into their immoral unrighteousness. They drown out that voice of reason and conscious by sleeping with more people or by doing more drugs or by idolizing their work as they climb the corporate ladder or by the neglecting to meet at church with Christians. And sometimes they try to suppress the truth by trying to argue intellectually or flat out denial.

It is hard to deny what Paul says has been clearly been made known to them in vs. 19. Why is God’s wrath revealed? God has shown Himself to them and they have suppressed the truth of that revelation. But what does Paul mean that God has shown it to them in vs. 19? What does He mean that it is plain to them? We see the answer to this in vs. 20. God has made Himself known through Creation.

You see, there are things about God that we cannot see, but we can see the effects of His attributes through the creation of the world. His power, His majesty, His glory, His creativity . . . but even more than this, the reality that He exists is clearly seen through the creation of the world. The creation obviously points toward a creator. This is one of the things that just doesn’t make sense. It takes a whole lot more faith to believe that everything comes from nothing than it does to believe that everything comes from One Almighty Being. And no matter how many times we say this to people, they just don’t want to get it!

It just doesn’t make sense to stand outside on a really dark night looking up to the stars watching the latest meteor shower and think, “Wow, it’s amazing how all of this came from some explosion of stuff that I have no idea where it even came from.” Paul says that God’s attributes have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world through that which has been made. The creation points to God.

📖 Psalm 19:1 → “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”

The Bible makes it clear that the wicked man is always trying to suppress God’s truth. The fool is constantly trying to convince himself that there is no God. This is the suppression of God’s revelation. This is
why so many people seek to attack the beginning of the Bible. The entire battle of Creation and Evolution has very little to do with how things began. It has everything to do with how things are going to end. You see, if you can accurately deny that God does not exist, then you are not accountable to Him and you can live any way you want. This is the suppression of the truth Paul talks about in vs. 18. You suppress the truth of His existence because then you will not stand accountable to Him for your actions. And the result is that you can live it up!

But what Paul is saying that Creation itself stands as the judge. Because God has so clearly revealed Himself through what has been made, all men are without excuse. Natural revelation does not lead anyone to salvation, but to the reality that God’s judgment is fair and that all people are without excuse. This stands as true for everyone we know and come in contact with today as much as it does for everyone Paul knew when he wrote this. And it still stands true of everyone everywhere in the world.

“Every person is ‘without excuse’ because every person—whether a first-century pagan or a twentieth-century materialist—has been given a knowledge of God and has spurned that knowledge in favor of idolatry, in all its varied manifestations. All therefore stand under the awful reality of the wrath of God.”

Natural revelation is enough to condemn man, but not enough to save them. Maybe that explains why Paul was so urgent to go to Rome and other places to take the gospel to them. He knew that the creation of the world is enough to condemn them, but they needed to hear the message of Jesus and the cross to be saved.

Regardless, his point is that God’s wrath is revealed because mankind has no excuse, yet they still suppress this truth. And in so doing, they become idolaters. This is the missing link in vs. 20, the reason why they are held without excuse is that even though they know God through creation, they do not seek Him or give thanks to Him. They would rather worship themselves than Him. Look at the next several verses . . .

**Vs. 21–23** Now, to be fair, Paul is not saying that they knew all there is to know about God. What he is saying is that they know in their hearts that there is a God (probably in the sense of a Creator of all that exists). They refuse to acknowledge that there is Someone great than

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themselves. They refuse to acknowledge the vast chasm between them and God.

This refusal is seen in the fact that they do not honor God as God. They do not worship Him. They reject Him as Creator, yes, but also as someone worthy to be worshipped. Instead of giving thanks to Him, they mock Him. This rejection of His truth doesn’t lead man to more wisdom, but to real stupidity. Paul describes it as they become futile in their thinking, leading to hearts that are darkened. When people choose to ignore God and come up with their own version of reality, their misguided minds lead toward further darkness.

This is probably one explanation for why people do and say things that don’t make sense to us. Or, maybe why they don’t get it when we say things like “It’s a baby in the womb that they are killing.” They don’t get it because they have become futile in their thinking and their hearts are now darkened.

“In a moral universe it is impossible to turn from the truth of God and not suffer the consequences. Ignorance is the result of a choice. People who do not “know” God are those who have made that choice.”

It’s inevitable that once someone who was created in the Image of God with a mind meant to pursue Him, turns that mind away from Him and does not honor Him with that mind or does not thank Him for His truth . . . that mind then becomes futile and unintelligent. Ignorant.

But they don’t think they are foolish in their thinking, do they? Paul understood this thousand’s of years ago. Look what he says in vs. 22: “Claiming to be wise, they became fools.” They claim to be wise, but he says they are fools. This is so true. What do those who are the so-called intellectuals think about God? They think it’s stupid to believe in God. They think it’s childish to believe that there is an Almighty Being who created the world. The wisest people in our world today believe that the world was created through a big bang of stuff that they don’t know even know where it came from. All so that they can deny there is a Creator.

Paul says they live in a world of illusions. They think they are seeing themselves and the world in which they live clearly, but they are looking through carnival mirrors. They are fools. It is the root word for “moron”, so you probably get the imagery here that Paul is trying to

make. Instead of fearing the Lord, which Proverbs 1:7 says is the beginning of wisdom; they reject Him, which is then the first step towards foolishness. One commentator said . . .

“At the very center of every person, where the knowledge of God, if it is to have any positive effects, must be embraced, there has settled a darkness—a darkness that only the light of the gospel can penetrate.”

Remember that statement, for we will come back to that later. It’s so true. It is so dark that nothing can penetrate it except the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This rejection of God’s truth finds itself fully engaged in idolatry. Paul says in vs. 23 that they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man. Think of the lunacy. Instead of worshipping a God who is immortal, we worship that which is mortal. Immortal means imperishable, meaning . . . eternal. It’s a reference to God being the self-existent One. He exists outside of creation. Conversely, mortal means perishable. It’s a reference to that which is in creation; that which is temporary.

So instead of worshipping God, who is outside of creation and is eternal, the one who rejects God’s truth decides to worship that which is in creation, that which is temporary. Instead of worshipping God, they worship man. Now, as we go through this, I’m sure this seems rather ridiculous. We know in our mind how stupid it sounds to worship man instead of God. But, let’s just be honest, how easy it is to find ourselves here worshipping mankind.

Whether it be a president, which seems ridiculous to us right now. But is it? What if it is the perfect guy who does everything right? Is there any chance that he might be the savior for our nation? Or what about the worship of a sports hero. Is there any doubt that Lebron is worshipped? How about a spouse, do you think there is any chance that the perfect husband or wife is worshipped? Or the idea of the perfect husband or wife? And what about kids?

“Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling little babies who goo and gaa and grow up playing your favorite sport and take the bulk of your time and energy.” Remember, one of my admonitions at the very beginning is that we not think it is just those “out there.”

7 Moo, 107.
The reality is that those who reject God’s truth don’t even just worship that which is the highest of creation. The folly of the man who rejects God’s truth even moves down the creation order and worships animals. Do you remember the people of God when they came out of Egypt and were waiting for Moses who was up on the Mountain receiving the Law from God?

Psalm 106:19–20 → “They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a metal image. They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass.”

But this doesn’t happen today, does it? Could I just suggest one example: Cecil the Lion. I’m not trying to make a joke about the seriousness of killing an animal for sport, specifically luring an animal the way Cecil apparently was in order to be killed. But does anyone else find it extremely ironic that this happened just about the time that the Planned Parenthood videos were released? Here we saw first hand the lunacy of our society. While there are about 700,000 babies aborted this year in America alone, the outcry of our culture is that a lion is killed! A LION! An Alpha Male Predator, who in the open may or may not have ripped that man apart himself.

It just doesn’t make any sense, does it? Unless you realize that this is the inevitable movement of a society that has rejected the truth of God. Maybe this is part of the wrath that is being poured out: foolishness! Ignorance! Lunacy! The loss of the God-given mind to think with any sort of logical reasoning! They think they are wise, when in reality, they are fools. They are illogical.

Before we move onto the next section, I wanted to take a few minutes and talk a little more practically about this suppression of God’s truth. Again, its easy to think of it as “those people out there” when in reality, there’s always the temptation that it is “this person in here.” How do we know if we are actually doing it or starting down the path of suppressing the truth of God as described in vs. 18? Let me suggest SEVERAL WAYS WE MAY SUPPRESS GOD’S TRUTH?

1. **Outright Rejection That God Exists**

Obviously, we have been talking about this. This is the most direct in this context of Romans 1. But I wonder if for some people, it doesn’t even start there.
2. **Putting Off Till Tomorrow To Get Things Right**

3. **Ignoring The Conviction Of The Spirit**

4. **Believing The Truth Applies To Others**

5. **Live In A World Of Generalities**