

The Wrath of God is Revealed

Romans Message #4

Romans 1: 18 – 32

Sermon by Pastor Sylvia Chan

Last time we finished studying Romans 1:1 – 17, in which the Lord Jesus Christ was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. The Lord's disciples were given the task to proclaim the gospel to all people, because the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. And it is in the gospel that the righteousness of God based on faith is revealed to the one who has faith.

Today we continue to study the rest of Romans chapter 1, from verses 18 – 32.

The wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men

ESV Romans 1:18-20 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Rom 1:18-20 ESV)

Here this passage says that the wrath of God is revealed against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, for they suppress the truth. In what sense do they suppress the truth?

Men have perceived God's eternal power and His divine nature through the things in the natural world. When men look at the things in the natural world, they know that all these were created by God, so they have no excuse. But many of them deny God's existence; they do not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him. Therefore God's judgment is upon them, and as a consequence their thinking becomes futile and their hearts are darkened. They think they are wise, but they have actually become fools. They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images of mortal men and birds and animals and even creeping things. That means they worship mortal men and birds and animals and even creeping things instead of the eternal God.

We may wonder whether these statements are true in our own experience. I was born in South Vietnam, and grew up there. (Please refer to my testimony, "Goodness and Lovingkindness Will Follow Me All the days of My Life".) Most people in South Vietnam at that

time worshipped family ancestors and some historical figures; my parents worshipped Chinese traditional deities and family ancestors, and I simply followed my parents' belief. It is true that I knew that God exists, but I didn't know the only true God Yahweh and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Indeed in Southeast Asia, it is common for people to worship birds and animals and even crawling creatures such as snakes. There are many different idols that are believed to take care of different concerns and interests of people; and people would choose the idols that suit their interests!

God gives them up the first time in the lust of their hearts

Romans 1:21-24 ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves (Rom 1:21-24 ESV)

This passage says that the people knew God! In what sense did they know God? In the sense that they know God exists, yet they do not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him.

Here we see that honoring God is closely linked with giving thanks to Him, because when we give thanks to God we acknowledge that everything we have all come from Him, we acknowledge His sovereignty over our lives. On the contrary, when people don't give thanks to God, they don't acknowledge His sovereignty. I have seen many people worship idols; ironically they give thanks to the idols instead of the only true God Yahweh. The consequence of not honoring God or giving thanks to Him is that their thinking becomes futile and their hearts are darkened.

What does it mean that their thinking became futile? The original Greek word for futile is “ματαιόω” (*mataiόō*). According to the Greek-English dictionaries, *mataiόō* means being given over to deceptive and meaningless thinking, becoming worthless or foolish, unable to think clearly.

It is true that most people in the world would only think of worthless or foolish things such as eating, drinking and enjoyment etc, but they have no interest in spiritual things. Their hearts are darkened, so they can't see the spiritual and eternal things, but see only the worldly, temporal things.

I have lived in various countries, in backward societies as well as advanced societies, and I have found that no matter whether people are intellectuals or laborers, most of them behave exactly like what this passage describes here. People know there is the righteous God, but most of them don't want to submit to His righteousness and His authority, therefore they don't seek this righteous God. All they want is just to have a prosperous and comfortable life, therefore they worship the idols who would give them riches and comfort.

I have encountered some people in Southeast Asia who even invented the kind of idols that suit their interests! Can you imagine people inventing their own idols! How foolish and ridiculous! Even some intelligent and learned people are willing to worship corruptible men, or birds or animals or even crawling creatures. As a consequence of this attitude, God gave them up to follow the lusts in their hearts. Since they love prosperity and riches, God would just let them go to chase after their hearts' desire!

God gives them up the second time to dishonorable passions

After God had given them up, the people did not repent and come back to the living God, instead they went from bad to worse:

ESV **Romans 1:25 – 27** because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature;²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. (Rom 1:25-27 ESV)

Here this passage says that God gave them up the second time. Why do men abandon the natural relations with women to be consumed with passion for one another? Why do women also exchange the natural relations for unnatural relations? Here it says it is because they all exchanged the truth of God for a lie, worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator; therefore God gave them up to dishonorable passions.

In a certain city in Asia, there is a snake temple where there are numerous snakes everywhere inside the temple. It is quite a popular and famous (or infamous) tourists spot! Some visitors may go there out of curiosity, but most people go there to worship the snakes simply because the snakes can give them what they desire! Human being can fall to such a low level worshipping the snakes just to satisfy their desires! That's why God gave them over to their desires!

God gives them up the third time to a debased mind

^{ESV} **Romans 1:28** And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. (Rom 1:28 ESV)

This final giving up sums up the previous two giving ups. Because people don't want to acknowledge God, therefore God gave them up to a debased mind to do debased things.

After God had given up the people three times, what happens to them? What is their spiritual outcome?

People did not repent and they even approve of those who practice these sins

^{ESV} **Romans 1:29 – 32** They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.³² Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. (Rom 1:29-32 ESV)

After God had given them up three times, their hearts became full of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder etc. But the worst part is in v.32: "Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them." Not only did they not repent, they continued to do these things, and even approved of those who practice these things.

From this situation of men we see that when people keep on sinning beyond a certain point, there is no return or any more forgiveness, but only the fire of judgment.

Conclusion

Now let's sum up everything we have studied today:

- The wrath of God is against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, because they suppress the truth.
- God gives them up because they do not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him.
- God gives them up the second time to dishonorable passions.
- God gives them up the third time to a depraved mind to do what they ought not to have done.

- But people did not repent and they even approved of those who practice these sins.
- We see that when people keep on sinning beyond a certain point, there is no more return.