

## Hell on Earth

Romans 1:18-32

Key Verse: 21

*“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.”*

If you leave something alone long enough eventually it will break down and fall apart. If you do not take care of your body properly eventually you will get sick, the same will happen to your car. Many of you have helped pull the weeds out of the back yard at the Bible house, some have done it twice. And now they are growing back again even though we used weed killer. Whatever it is, if you don't take care of it as it needs it will fall apart. It's the same for our world. If God leaves us alone, not only will we fall apart personally, but so will our world. In today's passage we will see what happens to a world without God it will literally become hell of earth.

In the previous passage it says that God revealed his righteousness in the gospel. However in today's passage God reveals his wrath. We like to hear that God is love because it makes us feel safe and loved. And it's true, God is merciful, patient and kind, but he is also righteous. And what we need is to have a balanced view of who God is. He does love us true, but he will also judge us. Take a look at 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,” In this verse we see the other side of God, the side where his wrath is revealed. The wrath of God refers to his anger toward sin. This anger however isn't like the angry person who blows up because they've had a bad day. God's anger is based upon his righteousness not emotion. Its anger against evil that will not go away until that evil is made right. God does not pour out his wrath on men right away, as they may deserve. For if he did, there wouldn't be anyone left on our planet. Because of God's kindness, tolerance and patience, he doesn't punish us the moment we sin. (2:4) However someday, all the sins of mankind will be punished with the full measure of justice, (2:5) but for the time being, God reveals his wrath occasionally to help mankind realize he is righteous. Verse 18 says that God reveals his wrath against the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth. Godlessness is living without God. Take the people of Sodom and Gomorrah for example, they were wicked and sinning greatly against the Lord. (Gen 13:13) They succeeded in legalizing their unnatural lifestyles and basically lived ignoring God, but could they escape God's wrath. No. God rained down burning sulfur destroying the cities. Through this event, God taught his servant Abraham that God is righteousness.

Wickedness is being evil or morally bad in principle. A wicked person is someone who is evil in motive, thought and action. If you remember back when we studied 1 Samuel, the Bible says that priest Eli, his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were wicked in the sight of God. They inherited the position of priest from their father. They should have taken care of the people, but instead they abused their position to satisfy the desires of their flesh. They took offerings that belonged to God and ate the best parts for themselves and indulged in immorality with the servant girls. Eventually God said, “Enough,” and in the end, he put them to death with the sword of the Philistines. (1Sa 2:34; 4:11) Maybe a more modern example would be the leaders of the company Enron. Enron was formed in 1985 and grew from a small gas pipeline into one of the nation's biggest energy providers with over 22,000 employees and 100 billion revenue. Fortune magazine reported that it was one of the top 100 companies to work for 5 consecutive years from 1996 until its eventual collapse in 2001. As reports came out, it was found that the leaders of the energy company acted wickedly. Not only did they use illegal business practices to make their company appear more profitable than it really was, they manipulated the California energy market by causing rolling blackouts leaving people without power for hours on end, even hospitals, just so they could drive up the price of electricity. They would randomly shut down power plants to give the appearance of system overload. They took advantage of their employees, and all their relatives, by encouraging them to invest their lifesavings and retirement accounts in Enron stock. Even after bad reports were coming out they lied and said everything was alright. Even up to the point of the company's collapse, they deceived people. They hired people from out of state who sold their houses and moved to Texas only to have the company crash and they were stuck with no money and no job in a city with extremely high unemployment rate because it was flooded by ex-Enron employees. The leaders mislead investors and took huge sums of money for themselves. Eventually they were caught and brought to justice. Kenneth Lay, the company's founder and chairman, was convicted and sentenced to prison. And maybe it's God's punishment for his wickedness or maybe it was the stress of it all but three weeks before he was to report to prison, he had a heart attack and died. The Lord does not take wickedness lightly. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 warns wicked people. It says, “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor

swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” Normal people feel remorse when they do something wrong, however when they keep getting away with it and are not punished immediately by God, if they don’t repent, they run the danger of their hearts becoming hard and they begin to think, “Hey, I can do what I want because I’m getting away with it.” But God is not blind. Psalm 94:9 says, “Does not he who made the eye see everything that men do?” God knows the secrets of men’s hearts. (Ps 44:21) God will bring about justice in his planned time. In the meantime, God reveals his wrath against men’s godlessness and wickedness as a warning from God that we should not take lightly.

Verse 18 says that men suppress the truth by their wickedness. Here “the truth” is that God is the Creator of man and the world. Each person’s life came from God. To suppress this truth is to ignore the existence of God and deny our relationship with him along with its accompanying responsibilities. The underlying reason people do this is because they want to live the way they want to live, which usually means enjoying sin. In other words, people know that God exists, but they deliberately suppress this truth so that they can go on enjoying the life of sin. They are like children who say it day when it really is night just so they can stay up a little longer. To put it simply, people reject God because they want to sin. Many years ago, a person that I studied the Bible with for over 3 years suddenly rejected the idea that there will be a hell. It was weird because all along he said that he was a Christian. Later he told me that the reason was because if hell was real, then that meant someday there had to be a judgment to put people in hell, and he knew that he was living the way God wanted and he would be condemned to hell if he continued living the sinful life the way he was. However instead of repenting of his sin and turning to God, he decided to deny the existence of hell and judgment. I heard a story about a religion teacher at a major university who made the following presentation: “God claims to be almighty. God claims to be good. There is evil in the world. These cannot all be true at the same time. Therefore, there is no God.” In other words, he used men’s own wicked behavior as a basis for rejecting God’s existence. There are things that outright deny the truth of God’s creation like the theory of evolution which ignores basic evidence like fossil records. But there are also things that subtly suppress the truth of God like modern advertising that make people desire and worship things other than God, like sex, power, money and pleasure. These are only a couple of ways people suppress the truth by their wickedness. There are countless other ways.

To expose the fact that man’s suppression of the truth is a deliberate act of wickedness, Paul mentions the undeniable evidence of God’s existence. Take a look at verse 20. “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.” God is invisible, but, like the wind, the evidence of his presence is obvious and unmistakable. For example how about when a person’s life is completely changed and their sinful desires are taken away. But Paul mentions two specific invisible qualities of God: his eternal power and his divine nature.

God’s eternal power is clearly displayed in his creation. Genesis 1:1 says that God created the heavens and the earth. When we look at the heavens and earth we see God’s power and intelligent design. When we look at the location of the earth and how it’s placed in what’s called the Goldilocks zone. As a result we are not too hot and not too cold, we are just right. When you look at how the earth is set up, the distance from the sun, how the eco systems work together to replenish and renew everything works perfectly. That’s the macro scale, it also applies to the micro scale as well. Take a look at our own bodies, the DNA, the systems, everything is designed so precisely. We have advanced far in technology and yet we can’t make a camera that compare to the human eye, or a computer that compares with the human brain. And can you believe that you have hydrochloric acid in your stomachs and yet it doesn’t burn through your bodies? It’s amazing that something that so destructive to our bodies on the outside actually exists on the inside, and not only that our bodies make it. These are the only the physical qualities, what about the spiritual. God made man in the image of God. Many beautiful and extraordinary gifts are revealed in the souls of men which transcend time and space. These draw our attention heavenward, and to the conclusion that God gave them these gifts. When we hear someone sing a beautiful song, we say, “Wow, they have a God given gift.” Ecclesiastes 3:11a says, “He (God) has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men....” People long for eternity in their hearts. We are conscious of another reality beyond the physical world. For example, in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, there is a tribe of native people that came to understand God’s eternal power from nature. They saw the caterpillar go into his cocoon and come out as a beautiful butterfly. They understood that mortal people can have a new life after death. They believed that the One who can do this would come and visit them someday. They didn’t need anyone to tell them that God’s eternal power was revealed in nature. They could see it for themselves and understood it. (missionary Don Richardson in 1963.)

God's divine nature is so amazing, how can I cover it in such a short time? But let's think about a few examples. There is a fish called a steelhead salmon. It is born in small rivers and after growing to adult size, it leaves the river and travels the oceans, sometimes throughout the whole world. Then after three years, these fish find their way back to the exact river where they were born and swim upstream, jump up waterfalls and go through many obstacles just so that they can return to their birthplace, lay their eggs and die. Who taught them how to navigate the oceans? Or what about the Canadian geese? At just the right time they decide to fly south for the winter. They organize themselves in a flying formation, rotate their positions, so that they can conserve their strength and fly great distances. They find their way to Florida for a nice winter vacation and come back at the right time. Who taught them how to do all that? No one, because it was written in their DNA. Everything reveals God, it's hidden in plain sight. These days people want to push the idea that science and faith are opposing conflicting ideas, but I don't believe that. I believe that science explains how God's work is carried out. I believe that science and faith walk hand in hand. God plainly revealed his eternal power and divine nature in his creation. If you open your eyes you will see it. By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can't see: his eternal power and the mystery of his divine being. So nobody has a good excuse. God plainly revealed the image of God in man. All men know that God exists. Those who deny God's existence are liars and they will inevitably face the wrath of God.

Verse 21 is the simplest description of what sin is. Let's read verse 21. "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." Since Paul clearly established that men know God, therefore, men are obligated to glorify God and thank their creator. Their failure to do so is a sin of omission. We must know that not glorifying God nor thanking him are serious sins in his eyes. God is the Creator and men are his creation, made for his glory. God gave man the gift of life and the privilege of enjoying the world he created. So we should glorify God and thank him for it. We should use the unique gifts that he gave us to glorify him. So those who are gifted musically should write songs that sing his praise. Or those who have been given a brilliant mind, should use them for the glory of God. When people are thankful, they can do this, however when they are not thankful they begin to glorify themselves with their God-given talents and gifts. Mankind has received everything from God. The world we live in, our lives, our health, our minds. In my case, God has not only given me these, but he helped me graduate, get a job, get married, have kids. Everything I have had been given to me by God. (I have to thank God for his blessing upon my life – I don't deserve it) Actually this is the case with all people whether they acknowledge it or not. When they acknowledge it, God is glorified, however when they don't acknowledge it nor thank God, this reveals their pride and ingratitude. Pride and ingratitude are the root of sin. Pride is what caused Satan, God's top angel, to fall. Pride and ingratitude start our journey down to total depravity.

The last part of verse 21 says, "...but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." When someone is proud and unthankful toward God their mind becomes corrupted and incapable of producing results. This happens because they begin to focus more and more on their sinful desires eventually using their God-given creativity to do evil. Jeffery Dahmer, a convicted criminal and cannibal, said in an interview from prison, that he always had desires to do the evil things he did. When he lived in Florida, his grandma made him go to church. While he was there he could suppress those desires. However when he moved to Wisconsin, no one was there to take him to church and he couldn't suppress those thoughts. Eventually he acted upon those thoughts and committed some of the most gruesome acts any human being could commit. When we do not thank God eventually our hearts become dark. We can lose the meaning and direction of our lives. Often they dwell in sorrow, bitterness, regret, despair, hatred, and fall into depression. Some even commit suicide.

Look at verse 22. "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools..." What is a fool? According to this passage a fool is one who doesn't make good trades. Foolish men who live without God make three foolish exchanges. In the first place, they exchange the glory of God for idols. Look at verse 23. "...and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles." Instead of worshipping the glorious, immortal God, people worship cheap images. When people worship God, they can grow in the image of God and taste the joy and peace of heaven. But when people worship idols, they become fools and end up as slaves to those idols.

Secondly, they exchanged the truth of God for the devil's lie. Look at verse 25. "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen." God made man to be a truth seeker. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6). This word of truth is Jesus himself. When Jesus is in our hearts we are happy and sure about what we are doing. But when men deny God, they exchange the word

of truth for a lie. All you have to do is look at the magazines when you are in line at the grocery store. They show you the lies of Satan. For example, one magazine lies to women saying, “You will be satisfied if you know how to satisfy your man.” That’s a lie, because if live like that you will be empty. The ultimate lie that Satan carries out is when he leads men to worship all kinds of things, anything but God. Like money, other people and even themselves. Idol worship results in moral and spiritual bankruptcy and complete shame.

In the third place, they exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. Look at verse 26b. “Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.” Women are the symbols of beauty in God’s world. Their roles as wives and mothers are the bedrock of society and the strength of any nation or people. Women should have a beautiful dream of marriage and establish a godly home that produces good fruit for the generations to come. They should have a beautiful romance and marry in God’s providence. But when they leave God out, even women become so perverse that they try to have romance with other women. What about men? Look at verse 27. “In the same way the men also abandoned 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 perversion.” It is interesting that homosexuality provokes an immediate expression of God’s wrath. When people refuse to know God, they soon didn’t know how to be human either—women didn’t know how to be women and men didn’t know how to be men. They become sexually confused and end up abusing and defiling one another.

The phrase, “God gave them over” is repeated three times in verses 24-28. Look at verse 24. “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.” When people persist in enjoying their sinful desires and never repent in their hearts, God does not contend with them forever. God reaches a point where he says, “If that’s what you want, that’s what you get.” (Gen 6:3). God will not force himself upon us. He allows men to live without him, and that means he withdraws his protection from them as well. Then what happens? Take a look at verses 28-31. “Furthermore, 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. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. 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 are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.” This is a picture of hell. It is the result of removing God from society. This kind of society cannot last, it will self-destruct. This kind of society came about when individual people abandoned God to live according to their sinful desires. God’s ultimate wrath, is that he leaves us to our own devices, our own desires. And when this happens it will be hell on earth. We must not be deceived. People do not find lasting happiness without God. People are truly miserable when they live without faith. Look at verse 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.”

People think that they will be better off if they don’t have to live by rules. High school students think that they will be better off when they don’t have to live by their parent’s rules so when they get to college it’s their chance to live according to their desires. But many have ended up suffering because of this way of thinking. This is Satan’s lie. When we take God out of our life or society, the world will degenerate. Our sins will run wild. The world will become chaotic and it will be survival of the strongest. History proves it. Just look at the uncontrolled greed that caused the financial collapse of 2008, or the lust for power that lead to world war, like Hitler or Stalin. Look at the lust for sex that created one the worlds largest industry- porn. This is only the beginning, it will only continue to get worse and worse if we continue to push God farther and farther away. But thank God that he doesn’t abandon us for he gave us the gospel and sent his only Son Jesus to save us. He will send Jesus who one day will come back for us so that we can live with him in heaven forever. Praise God for his mercy, faithfulness and love that he rescues us from hell on earth so that we can be in heaven with him.