

“The Wrath of God Revealed”

Romans - The Gospel of God

Romans 1:18-32

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Jeff: I'll pray in just a minute, but I have something I want to share.

Don Maurer: Should I record this or not?

Jeff: Oh, I wouldn't record this. *(Laughter)* I don't know about you guys, but you know, it feels after a while like you just get into a rhythm and a routine with this whole COVID thing. And you know, I woke up this past week and thought to myself, you know, I feel like a punching bag. Don has really tried just to land an upper cut and then a cross. And you know, I've just been taking it. And I thought to myself, what am I doing? I've got to get back on my game! *(Laughter)*

So I did a little research. *(Laughter)* I did; I did a little research. I don't know if you know this or not, but a famous rock star died recently. His name was Dusty.

Ted Wood: Oh yeah.

Jeff: Yes. And I dug up—

Don: Dusty Springfield? She was a woman.

Jeff: You just hold on there, Don. *(Laughter)*

Don: All right.

Jeff: And I dug up a little research that proved to be very fruitful.

Transcriber's Note: A picture of a rock star on the board.

Jeff: And I found this picture of Don back when he had hair. *(Laughter)* Now the great thing about it is, look who's on drums! *(Laughter)* John Calvin! *(Laughter)* But apparently, (and I don't know if you know this little known fact), once Don lost his hair he decided that he was going to shave. And that is when the band split. *(Laughter)* Yes, it's a little known fact.

But I digress. And I wanted to share that with you. And I'll be trying to share other things about the life of Don in the coming days. *(Laughter)* But that will depend on how aggressive he gets in the coming days. *(Laughter)* All right, Don. Are you just going to let us go into prayer?

Don: Yes.

Jeff: Okay. All right, let's pray together. Our gracious heavenly Father, we are thankful for this day and for the time You've given to us and for the great love with which You loved us in Jesus Christ our Lord. We're thankful for life in Him, and for all of the benefits that we have in Him—for our justification and sanctification, for our adoption—for all of these things and many others. And Father, we're thankful that this life in Christ is not our own, but it is Christ's life in us. And we're thankful that we don't share it alone either, that we are in the church with others in Christ. Father, this is a great blessing to us, and we're thankful for it. We ask also that You'll cause our lives to be like those clay pots that Paul describes, where light shines out of them, out of them into the darkness around us. So use us as instruments in Your hands, Father, as You bring others to the knowledge of the gospel.

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And Lord, we pray that a warning like this to others will help to equip us in that endeavor. Father, we also pray not only for the equipping, but we also pray for our own edification, that we might interact with our families, that we might interact with friends, that we might have good Christian conversations, iron sharpening iron.

Father, we also pray that You’ll bless our gathering. We pray, Father, that You’ll continue to bless us as we are now able to meet again. And thank You for that, Father. We ask now as well that You’ll bless Bruce. And we certainly pray that Your hand would be upon him in these days. Lord, we pray that You’ll be with his wife, especially as she tends to him. Father, we pray that You’ll give Bruce the ability to be well balanced, and not to exceed his abilities and to work within his limitations, that he might not put undue stress upon his wife.

Father, we also pray and ask that Your hand would be upon us for good as we think about Your word in Romans 1 this morning. Bless us in it, for we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: All right. Don, do you have Romans 1? You don’t.

Don: Yes, I do.

Jeff: You do?

Don: Yeah.

Jeff: Okay. Why don’t you read 1:18-32? We’ll take a larger chunk today.

Don: Sure. But Jeff, I just can’t help but think that you are really a closet *textus receptus* fan. You are a closet New King James fan; I don’t care what you say. *(Laughter)* You always ask me to read it, so you must be. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Listen to you, buddy. *(Laughter)* Yeah, I’m not; go ahead. *(Laughter)* I’m going to leave your picture of Z. Z. Top up on the board.

Don: Okay, Jeff; that’s fine. This is being recorded, Jeff; remember that. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Go ahead.

Don: All right; let’s get serious. *(Laughter)*

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

“Therefore God gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, in receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

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“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.” This is the word of the Lord.

Brave Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: Okay. I only want to point this out. Did you hear the rebuke that Don gave? “Let’s get serious now.” What Bible study has he been part of for the last several years? *(Laughter)* Anyway, I want to talk to you about the next section in Romans today. We’re going to take a large section. And we’re going to treat it in some ways as an overview of that section. I hesitate for us to really go too slowly through the book of Romans. So we’ll stop where you would like to stop. If the lesson goes over then it will go over into the next time; that’s fine. But what I want us to start off by doing is looking at the lay of the land from 1:18 to chapter 3 verse 20. I want us to think about what’s coming. Then we’ll go back to verses 18-32 and just sort of take a look at those verses. And I’ll break it into heads, and we’ll try to touch everything in the chapter. But you let me know if I’m going too fast over a certain point or not.

I want you to realize that Paul has an imaginary friend in this particular section. He has an interlocutor: he’s got a debater that he’s thinking of. He has an imaginary debater, if you will. And what he’s doing is, he’s addressing the Jews and the Gentiles as he unfolds his argument. And one of the things that we need to realize is that in 1:18-32 we find the beginning of this unfolding argument.

And it really does attack the Gentiles. I mean, the Gentiles are in view in 1:18-32. It’s the Gentiles who we’re going to find in Paul’s sight who are unrighteous and ungodly.

And in chapter 2, verses 1-5, we find this Jew sitting in the back of the congregation shaking his head in the affirmative.

Transcriber’s Note: Romans 2:1-5. *“Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”*

Jeff: He’s saying, “You give it to ‘em, Paul! That’s exactly right; they need to hear this.” You know how that is. You can see the guy sitting in the back of the church doing that. Well, that’s the way this Jew is.

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But Paul goes on to say to this Jew, “Yes, but you practice the same.” In other words, “you practice sin as well.” And then what we find Paul saying in 6-11 is that both Jews and Gentiles are under the judgment of God.

Transcriber’s Note: Romans 2:6-11. *“Who will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.”*

Jeff: So the Jew doesn’t escape. The Gentile doesn’t escape. But the Gentile comes back and in verses 12-16 of chapter 2, “Wait a minute. We don’t have the law.”

Transcriber’s Note: Romans 2:12-16. *“For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.”*

Jeff: “And so if we don’t have the law, then how can we be held accountable for having broken the law?” And Paul deals with that in those.

Now in 17-29 Paul says to the Jew, “You can’t rely on the law or the sacraments or your righteousness.” In other words Paul turns from the Gentiles who said, “We don’t have the law; they have the law. But we don’t have the law.” But he says, “No, you have the law and it’s written upon your heart, and you don’t escape that.”

But then he turns to the Jew and he says, “You guys who have the law, you can’t treat having the law as having righteousness.” In other words, that’s what they were doing. They would say, “We are the circumcision. And so we are obviously the favored of God. In fact, we have the law.”

And I’ll tell you how this works out even today. Years ago I was going to college. And we went to this synagogue as part of our “Indigenous Religious Traditions” course, and we listened to the rabbi speak to us. And we were asking him questions at the end. And during the question and answer period he said to us, “You know, the difference and the problem with you Christians is that you need Jesus Christ.” And he said, “We have the law as our mediator between us and God.” And he said, “The law is sufficient.”

And so Paul would say to him, “You can’t look to the law for your righteousness, because you’ve transgressed the law. Just as the Gentiles have transgressed the law written upon their hearts, so too you have transgressed the law written on tablets of stone, and the ordinances do not help you.” And then by the time you get to chapter 3 Paul says that all are under condemnation, Jew and Gentile alike. All are wrapped up under that condemnation of God.

So that’s the lay of the land. So from 1:18-3:20 we’re really going to look at an unfolding argument between Paul, Gentiles and Jews. And one of the things that we’re

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going to find is that Paul is arguing basically for the total depravity of man—the sinfulness of man and his inability to please God at any given point. So that’s basically the structure.

With that in mind let’s go back to chapter 1, verses 18-32. And let’s think about some things as they unfold in that particular chapter. And the first thing that I think that we have to realize when we open up to 1:18 is that *we suppress what God has revealed about Himself*.

Now let’s think about that for a minute. What has God revealed about Himself in this text? What does He say that He’s revealed about Himself here in this text? What does it say? What can be known about God?

Bishop Rodgers: His power and divinity.

Jeff: What’s that again?

Bishop: Power and divinity.

Jeff: I’m sorry.

Don: Power and divinity.

Jeff: Power and divinity; I didn’t hear the p. Power and divinity. Now Paul says those things are plain. What can be known is plain; it’s clear.

Now think about this. Look at what the text says. The text describes these attributes as “*invisible attributes*.” This power and this divinity are invisible attributes. And yet he goes on to say that they are “*clearly perceived*.”

Transcriber’s Note: ESV.

Jeff: Now let’s talk about that for a minute. What does he mean by that? What does he mean that we have attributes that are invisible and yet clearly perceived? What do you think that means?

Ron Baling: To me that means that we judge other people by what they say and do. That implies that we know who that person is.

Jeff: Okay. So what things would God say and do that would be clearly manifest that we would know?

Ron: The intricacies of creation.

Jeff: Okay. So we would see these things in creation. These things are clearly manifest to us in the things that are made. And so these are things that we would take to ourselves and perceive. And the idea of perceiving them I think would carry the idea of understanding with the mind. We understand in our thinking, in our minds, that there is a Creator, that there is a divine hand behind these things.

Now how do we understand that? Well, what can be known? Remember, eternal power and divine nature; those things can be known. Now when we say those kinds of things, what do we mean that the eternal and divine nature can be known? Well, I think that for instance we may say something like this. We might say that when we look at the world around us, and for instance that we see the placement of the earth from the sun, realizing that if it’s a little bit too far we’re going to freeze; if it’s a little bit too close, we’re going to burn up. When we look at those kinds of things we realize that there’s an intelligence behind the Designer that manifests itself in the creation. And so we see power.

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Now here’s what I think about how we need to see the power of the Deity. When you look at that power that’s manifested in the creation, what kind of power is that? Well, the kind of power that we would describe is divine power. So we would look at the power manifested in creation as a divine power. So it’s His power and divinity that are seen; they’re of one piece. In other words, the kind of power that’s on display is a divine power.

So I think that’s the way that we need to understand the text at this point. And the question is how can these things be known? I mean, you guys have already said how they can be known. They can be known by what we see in general revelation.

Now what we see in general revelation needs to be distinguished, and I’ll just say this. This is where we sometimes get into a little bit of tense times with those who enjoy apologetics, because when we talk about general revelation we are talking about what God has done in the world. And when we think about general revelation we think about what God has done mediately. And what I mean by that is that God in creating the world around us mediates knowledge of Himself in that creation.

Now the question is, what about that knowledge? And this is where we have to go to the next level of thinking. And we have to say that this is natural theology. In other words, the knowledge that comes out of general revelation is described as a natural theology, okay?

Now there are those like Sproul and others who would say that we can have a really true natural theology. And in fact this is the common denominator between believers and unbelievers. We can reason from the general revelation to things that they would agree with.

Now the problem is that there are those who would say, wait a minute. You can never have a natural theology out of general revelation because of what we’re going to see in this text. And we’ll talk about what we’re going to see in this text, and why some would argue that we can never have a natural theology. Any questions up to this point, or things that you want to talk about before we head into the next section? Yes, Bishop?

Bishop: The fact that we engage in idolatry indicates that we have some kind of knowledge that we’ve distorted. And so in a way you can say that idolatry is a kind of witness to natural theology that is corrupted.

Jeff: Yes. And you know, to use Calvin’s example, it’s like a person walking with a blindfold on through a well-lit theater. But the problem in that example is that we are not those with whom the blinders are on. And we’re not just kind of walking through and being led by someone. We are holding the blinders on, right? We’re trying to strap the blinders to our faces. And the reason why we’re trying to hold the blinders on is because we know what’s outside of the blinders, and we don’t want to see through it. We’re holding what’s out there down.

And the interesting thing (and we’re going to come to this), but the idea is that what is being held down with active force by us is also not wanting to be held down. And I can’t remember who it was. One theologian talked about it. It’s like holding down a spring. The spring is pushing up and we are pushing down on the spring. I think it was Francis Schaeffer who spoke like this, because what he said was, look. You read guys like Carl Sagan, and they start capitalizing the c in cosmos. That’s a manifestation that they’re not able to hold the knowledge of the truth all the way down, because they have to have some

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sort of overarching principle that gives meaning to all other things. Or Francis Crick when he capitalizes the a in atom, or something like that. He capitalized n in nature. Those kinds of things manifest the truth that they’re trying to suppress—those kinds of things. Hold on a second, Don. Ted, did you still—

Ted: No, that’s okay.

Jeff: Hold on then, Gary. Don, did you want to—

Don: Yes. And talking about that it seems to me that the overwhelming majority in the scientific academic community demonstrate this all the time, where they don’t even want to hear anyone talk about intelligent design. And if you do you’re in real trouble.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: They’re going to get very upset.

Jeff: Yeah. Gary, how did you get the microphone?

Gary Dunbar: I was just handed this.

Jeff: Gary just flips up the microphone; that’s great. *(Laughter)* Okay.

Bishop: He just brought his own. *(Laughter)*

Gary: Are you saying that natural theology is man’s perception of God in general revelation?

Jeff: Natural theology is what man deduces from the general revelation.

Gary: Albeit distorted, as the bishop said, by idolatry or whatever else.

Jeff: Yes. This is why those who say that natural theology can’t possibly represent the God who is is because they’re trying to hold down the very thing that they’re trying to deduce.

Ted: If there wasn’t a natural theology—I mean, if there wasn’t a common language with those who have not seen the Spirit, we wouldn’t have anything to talk about, unless there are some common assumptions.

Jeff: Well, you know, here’s the thing that we have to remember. We’ll talk about that if need be. But the whole idea of a common language—you know, we talk about—Well, never mind. *(Laughter)*

Bishop: What do you do with the cosmological argument and the teleological argument? Certainly as Christians we can articulate this, but those without Christian eyes eschew it.

Jeff: Yes. And so the people who say that you can’t possibly have a natural theology that can do any possible good would also say for instance that those classical arguments can have some efficiency with encouraging believers. But they can’t have any possible efficiency to convert a dead man.

Bishop: It can’t convert.

Jeff: Yes. Francis Schaeffer would have talked about that sort of thing as pre-evangelism. Not that it could save, but he would have put it on the other side of things. And when you look at this text I think that sometimes what begins to happen is that sometimes the guys who are on the classical and evidentialist apologetics side put a little too much weight on natural theology. And I think the guys that are on the pre-suppositional side actually hold down what’s in general revelation itself, because what the text says is that what can be known of God is known. And so whatever knowledge there is is knowledge. And it’s knowledge that they are holding down.

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And I happen to be on the pre-suppositional side. But this is the tendency that I see in my camp. And that is to actually sort of move general revelation to an area that becomes almost irrelevant. It’s all about special revelation. In fact the only time that general revelation is valuable is when it’s interpreted through special revelation. So general revelation is only valuable when it’s interpreted through special revelation, because otherwise sinful man is going to hold it down, right?

Now I think the question then becomes well, how is it held down? What do we do? And I think the answer to that has to be in this next part. We have this knowledge through what is made, or perceiving what is made, or understanding what is made. And I think we need to think about it like this. Maybe this will be helpful if we go in this direction.

When we think about philosophy one of the things that we think about is that we think about the structure and the category of things, right? So when we think about metaphysics we think about what is and what is behind what is. We think about epistemology, or how we know what we know. And then we think about ethics; that’s behavior, right?

Now think about this for a minute. You have a rock, okay? Now that’s the metaphysical aspect. Now you have a Christian here and you have a non-Christian here, okay? And the non-Christian and the Christian can agree that’s a rock. And the Christian believes that the rock came from inside the unbeliever’s head. (*Laughter*) But they both look at the rock and they see that it’s a rock.

Now the question is where did that rock come from? And this enters into the question of epistemology. Where did this rock come from and how do we know? And the Christian is going to say that well, God created it. And the unbeliever is going to say that well, the big bang happened. And all of a sudden we are at odds with one another epistemologically. Okay?

Now the question then becomes one of ethics, because we would say that in acknowledging the truth we are bowing the knee to the Creator. But in not acknowledging the truth of this rock this person is in rebellion against the Creator. And so when we think about those three areas of philosophy it kind of helps us categorize what’s happening between the believer and the unbeliever.

Now both of these, Christians and non-Christians, are not going to come to saving faith through general revelation, because general revelation was never made to save sinful man. And so when man sinned God added special revelation. But we’re not talking about special revelation at this point. We always need to keep that in mind.

But the interesting thing is that we perceive, we understand through what is made. And these things ungodly and unrighteous people suppress in unrighteousness—hold them down, okay? Anything else that you want to park on there before we go? Because I want to show you something. I want to show you how this works out; it’s just interesting when you see it in some of these quotes I’m going to put up on the board. Yes, Don?

Don: Going back to verse 18, Jeff, the wrath of God,--

Jeff: Yes, please. We’re going to get there, but go ahead.

Don: Oh, okay. If we’re going to get there,--

Jeff: No, go ahead.

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Don: All right. There are people who say, wait a minute! Wrath, that’s an undesirable characteristic in people. It conjures up rage and violence and everything. What would you say about a person objecting to the wrath of God, and how we’re to understand God’s wrath in light of His other attributes?

Jeff: Well that is a good question. And I do think that I’m going to wait to answer that with where we’re going.

Don: Sure.

Jeff: Because it will factor in.

Don: Okay.

Bishop: C. H. Dodd says the same thing.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bishop: He didn’t like wrath either.

Jeff: No.

Ted: We want justice, and wrath is simply a matter of God’s justice. Even the staunch unbeliever wants justice. We see it in the country today.

Jeff: Oh, yeah.

Ted: Calling for justice. I mean, we want justice. Every human being is wired to want justice. They just don’t want it for themselves. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: I mean, that’s true for all of us because we know what the consequences of justice are, and they are not pretty.

Jeff: I once had a philosophy class in a university setting. It was obviously not a believing setting. And I had a professor by the name of Richard Double. He was kind of an eccentric fellow. And he found out that I was a Christian and he hated that. He was also my contact at that time, and so I would meet him in his office. And every time he would just chip away at my Christianity, or try to. But he would always argue that there are no moral absolutes.

And so I was talking to my friend at a gospel bookstore. This professor was driving me nuts. And my friend said to me, “Well, Jeff, how does he run his class? Does he run his class in a pretty controlled way?”

And I said, “Yes. He has classroom rules that he expects me to follow,” and so on.

And he said, “Well, just break the rules.” *(Laughter)* “There are no absolutes, right? And so just break his rules because they’re not absolute.”

Bishop: They’re arbitrary.

Jeff: They’re arbitrary.

Ted: There are moral absolutes kind of, but ultimately there aren’t. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: So I said, “Well, what would you do?”

And my friend said to me, “I would get a newspaper and I would rustle it loudly. I’d turn to the window and read the newspaper while the class is going on.” *(Laughter)* And so I did. *(Laughter)* And he never said a word, not one word. *(Laughter)* But anyway let me put a couple of quotes upon the board.

A guy by the name of Immanuel Kant basically said this. You’ve got to get this perspective before you get this quote. He said that the mind is like an ice cube tray, and we take in discrete bits of data. The data from outside of us goes into our senses, into

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these ice cube trays and gets categorized. And so Kant would say that *“time and space are not external to us, but actually they are imposed upon these discrete bits of data by our minds.”* And so are quality and quantity and those kinds of things. And so Kant would say that there may be a God. But if there is a God He didn’t make us in such a way so as to know Him. Why? Because we say that God is invisible and immaterial, and so on. In other words God is not a precept or a perception that we can perceive and take into our minds.

And yet about 3/4 of the way through the book where he argues all of this he says this. He says, *“Two things fill the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe. The more often and the more intensely the mind and thought is drawn to them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.”*

Now here’s the interesting thing about that. He would have said that he would have described this as hypostatization. In other words, this is actually the mind going beyond itself, because that’s what reason does. Reason can’t actually be restrained; it goes beyond itself.

So, for instance, have you ever heard anyone talk about the question that if a tree falls in the woods and there’s no one there to hear it, does it make a sound? Well, the answer for Kant is that if there’s no one there then there’s no tree to fall. For instance, in some ways Kant is accusing you guys of what’s called *solipsism*, because in some ways you guys are just constructions of my own mental structures, all right?

Ted: I was looking for it. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Yes, because I get along with all of you. *(Laughter)* But Kant would say this. If we started to talk about the ocean right now, and our minds started to form a picture of the ocean, that’s the mind going beyond it’s ability because the mind actually doesn’t see an ocean in front of itself right now. It’s hypostatizing; it’s going beyond its abilities. And so what is real is what is in front of me at the moment. But he had to acknowledge that *“when I stand there and look at the starry cluster and think about the governing influences in me, I can’t help but stand in awe.”* In fact, that’s on his grave. That last line is on his gravestone.

Now there was a guy by the name of Freeman Dyson who was in New York. He did not have a Ph.D. in physics, but he did some tremendous things. And he said this. I don’t know if he was a believer or not. But he said, *“The more I examine the universe and the details in its architecture, the more evidence I find that the universe in some sense must have known we were coming.”* *(Laughter)* Now again, I don’t know if he was a believer or not. But what he is basically acknowledging is what we find in Romans 1:18 and following.

Now when you think about these things what do you find? In the understanding man understands that there is Someone there. Now you can understand that for instance with this bee example. It’s one of those great examples that was given to me several years ago.

There was a beekeeper in my congregation. And what he told me was that when bees hibernate for the winter, he said that they have a rotation pattern. He said that those on the uttermost part of the ball rotate and go in, and those on the innermost part of the ball go out. And the ball of the bees is regulated at a certain temperature. And when the ball gets too hot they open up pathways through the ball. They open up pathways to let air pass

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through in order to cool it down. And when it gets too cold they close those pathways up to heat. And all of this is done by bees, right? It’s almost like there was a Designer to this whole thing. *(Laughter)*

But anyway you get the idea. When someone looks at that sort of thing he says what Freeman Dyson did—that it almost looks as if the universe expected our coming, our manifestation.

Now when you think about this, this is the idea of man trying to hold down what is known to him. And how does he do it? Well, I want you to think about the mind in a similar way as the hand.

I’m going to argue this way, and you may disagree with me. But my hand probably looked like Adam’s hand. In other words Adam had an opposable thumb so that he could pick up tools. He had a pinky. And we all know what the pinky is for. You get water in your ear. *(Laughter)*

Ted: It’s to hold a teacup. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: It’s to hold a teacup. Well, my point is this. The hand is the hand. But the hand was never intended for me to take a tool up and strike someone with it, right? Who said “really?” *(Laughter)* Don, did you say that?

Don: No, no. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: But now think of the lie. I believe that for Adam one orange and one orange equaled two oranges, right? For Adam it wasn’t different. One orange and one orange didn’t equal three oranges. One plus one equaled two to Adam, just like it does to us. There were things like the law of non-contradiction, right? You know, the door is not opened and closed at the same time and in the same relation, right? It’s either open or it’s closed. And so that’s the law of non-contradiction.

Those are things that were part of Adam’s existence. My point is this. What Adam did when he sinned—and all of his posterity after him—was trying to use those tools of the mind—rationality and reason—to suppress the truth that God revealed in general revelation in their unrighteousness.

So for instance the physicist who knows all kinds of math that I will never know uses that to suppress the truth of the Scriptures and how the Scriptures interpret general revelation. They use it to suppress that, just like the murderer takes his hand and uses it to strike someone when that was never the intention of the hand. And that’s the way I think when there is an active suppression of what is known.

Now having said that, let me put this on the board. Some unbelievers are actually fairly honest in how they argue it. And this is not the only one. There’s a guy by the name of Thomas Nagle. Thomas Nagle was a philosopher. Nagle was a guy that argued in various ways, and he had more arguments than these. But he argued very strongly against God and the existence of God.

And this is how he did it. *“I want atheism to be true. And I am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God and naturally hope that I’m right in my belief. It’s that I hope there is no God. I don’t want there to be a God. I don’t want the universe to be like that. My guess is that this cosmic authority problem is not a rare condition.”*

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You know, “it’s not that I don’t believe in God; I hate him”—that kind of response. And therefore it gives the hand away, right? It’s not that you don’t believe in Him. It’s that you actually hate Him who exists and are trying to suppress His existence in unrighteousness. That’s the kind of thing that we’re dealing with here.

Well then, *we do not offer to God what He deserves*. Now let me just say this. *They knew Him*. How did they know Him? Well, we have already been through this. They know Him by what He has revealed in general revelation. And they in turn failed to glorify Him. They failed to give Him His due weight, and they failed to be grateful. They failed to thank Him. So they fail to give Him his due weight, and they fail to thank Him. That’s all I want to say about that, unless you want to dwell on that for a few minutes. Yes?

Brave Man: With the atheism it’s pretty clear. You know, they don’t want to recognize God because if they do then they recognize the consequences of God, right?

Jeff: Absolutely.

Brave Man: Ignorance is bliss.

Jeff: You know, there was a philosopher by the name of Jean-Paul Sartre who said, “*I feel that God is looking at me through the keyhole, and I don’t like it,*” right? (*Laughter*) And that’s exactly what you’re saying.

Ted: You know, we all don’t like it.

Jeff: Nope; we don’t.

Ted: At the bottom line we and the atheists are no different. God terrifies; He terrifies me and He terrifies the atheist. The difference is that by supernatural revelation and interpretation by that terror we flee to that terror

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: And the atheist runs from that terror.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: The prodigal son could have kept running away. But it is said that he decided to turn and run to the very father who could destroy his life.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: I don’t have this big anger or being upset with the atheist because he is just like I am. It’s only by the grace of God that God has allowed me to run to Him.

Jeff: Yes. How can you be angry with him if you actually believe that regeneration is the work of God Himself through His Spirit?

Ted: Yes. I digress. I remember decades ago sitting on the Outer Banks on the beach. And I’m all by myself; it’s great. I don’t like the beach, but I like it the first thing in the morning and the last time of the day. I was sitting on the beach at the time. There was nobody on the beach. There was not a cloud in the sky. I looked over the Atlantic, and the sky was like a dome, and I’m sitting on that chair on the beach. And it just struck me, and this is where I really got the understanding of this. I am so small and insignificant; I am as nothing as I am sitting here. And that terrified me since there was no protection. So at that point what do you do with that terror? That’s just what I would do.

Jeff: Yes. You know, I was just thinking that it’s this terrifying God to Luther and Calvin in Romans 1:16 and 17.

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Transcriber’s Note: Romans 1:16-17. *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”*

Jeff: But they realized that righteousness which was revealed was a righteousness revealed in Christ for them. And so in Christ we find in Him the satisfaction of that wrath.

Ted: What can I do about this terrible God, this awful God?

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: I can’t do anything. The atheist says that he can do something.

Jeff: Yes. Anybody else? Yes, Cork?

Corky Semler: This just bugs me. It doesn’t bug me; it’s a question that keeps coming up. Who’s holding that blindfold on? (*Laughter*)

Ted: We all are; that’s the point I’m making. We all are holding that blindfold on but for the grace of God.

Jeff: Yes, but for the grace of God; that’s right.

Ted: You ought to be terrified by God. He could emulsify you in an instant; make it as if you were nothing.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely.

Bishop: But as you said before, if you are converted you view the classical arguments as a delight.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bishop: They help to build your world view around Christ. And you get great satisfaction out of these things.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely.

Bishop: They’re not trying to prove something to the unbeliever. But for the life of the believer they’re wonderful.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely. Well, *we receive what we deserve*. What happens is, we become futile and dark in our thinking. And this is what we call the *noetic effect of sin*—noetic from *nus*, meaning *mind*. This is the effect of sin on the mind. Our thinking becomes futile and dark.

Now I want you to think about this for just a minute. When you think about futility you think about worthlessness. That’s what Paul is saying: our thinking is actually worthless because it doesn’t acknowledge Him. It actually holds down what is revealed about Him in unrighteousness. But it’s also dark.

But here’s the interesting thing. It’s not just that we’re in a dark room. Paul describes us later in Ephesians as darkness. We’re part of the problem. It’s not that we’re victims of darkness; we are darkness. And this is the problem with the mind, right? We don’t begin in a position of neutrality when we think about God. We are beginning in a position of antagonism; that’s the problem. We’re beginning in a position of antagonism. It’s not as if we can step out of our futility and out of our darkness.

Now what does God give as a result? His wrath. Don, this brings us back to verse 18. God reveals wrath against this ungodliness and unrighteousness.

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Now I want to say this. There’s a lot we could say, Don. And if I don’t satisfy your question, which I don’t fully remember, you can bring it back up here. But what I want to say is this. What does God give? Well, He reveals His wrath against this ungodliness and unrighteousness. And He reveals this wrath in a twofold manner.

Now what is that twofold manner? Idolatry and sexual immorality. In other words, He gives people over to their sinfulness, and so they are idolaters. All you have to do is look up Psalm 115 and see that. Here is man creating this idol. And then I think it’s in verse 8.

Transcriber’s Note: Psalm 115:8.

*“Those who make them are like them;
So is everyone who trusts in them.”*

Jeff: The Psalmist says that the idol worshiper becomes like the idol he worships. But I think you have to understand it like this. The reason he created the idol is because he was already like the idol that he fashioned with his hands. He basically gave expression to what was in him. And then that degenerates into sexual immorality.

Now we oftentimes think about it in this sort of way. We think about it as well, this is a formula, right? It moves from idolatry or getting rid of the Creator, and then moving into sexual immorality. But I think that when we think about how God judges I think there’s a way to think about what we find here that is a better explanation than just sort of this abstract, arbitrary way of thinking about it.

God judges by the principle of *Lex taliones*—in other words, an eye for an eye. We don’t find that God pours out His wrath in a greater measure than the sin deserves, right? God is not unjust. So God is not unjust in that He punishes too lightly. And God is not unjust so as to punish more severely. God punishes in just the right manner.

Now with these things—the twofold judgment of God’s wrath—we find this principle of *les taliones*. And would put it like this. Unnatural relationship to God leads to unnatural relationships with men. So when you think about idolatry, that’s an unnatural relationship between man and God. And when you think about an unnatural relationship between man and man and woman and woman, that’s the unnatural relationship in humanity that results. Go ahead, Don.

Don: Yes, Jeff. I guess that my point though was what the bishop said too about C. H. Dodd and his objection.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: When we hear about wrath the thing that usually comes to our minds is unreasoned rage, unrestrained rage and violence and anger that leads to murder, or whatever.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: And the unbeliever or even the young Christian might say this. How is God’s wrath different from that?

Jeff: Well, I think it’s interesting, because if memory serves me correctly the Greek word there is *orge*, which is sort of like—

Bishop: *Orge tus Theos*; the wrath of God.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: The wrath of God. *Orge*; it’s like an orgasm.

Jeff: Yes. It’s sort of like an unrestrained rage; you know what I mean.

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Don: Okay.

Jeff: Now we understand that God is never out of control. But the point is that the way it’s described to us is put in that term, which is pretty—

Corky: Severe.

Jeff: Yes, severe wrath.

Don: But it’s deserved. This brings up an interesting question. Was there wrath before the Fall? Did God still have the attribute of wrath? Is that an eternal attribute?

Jeff: I think some people would argue that wrath is not an attribute of God but a consequence of His righteousness.

Don: Okay.

Jeff: So this results from the exchanges that we see in the text. In verse 23 we see that sinful men exchange God’s glory for an image. In verse 25 you find the same thing. And so in verse 26 *“they exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.”* So you see the unnatural relationship with God and by consequence the unnatural relationship of man. And so the exchange is kind of put in front of us.

The three exchanges are matched by God’s sovereignty. *“God gave them over”*—verses 24, 26 and 28.

Transcriber’s Note: ESV.

Jeff: This is not then apart from God. This is done because God is judging. In other words, let me just put it this way. Somebody says something like this to you. “Boy, God is going to judge America!” Well, the fact of the matter is that all you have to do is look, and God has been judging.

Don: God is judging; yes.

Jeff: He is judging. The judgment is manifest in the unnatural relation we have with God and the unnatural relationship we have with man. The LBGTQ-plus community is evidence of the judgment of God among us. I realize that’s not popular to say. But if you have a Biblical world view you have to acknowledge it as true.

Ted: But the same thing has been true throughout history. I mean, we’re not unique in this human category in America. But we see this judgment again and again.

Jeff: Yes, that’s right. And so the lesson of this text is not necessarily homosexuality. The lesson in this text has to do with God, and men not acknowledging Him as to how He has revealed Himself.

Don: I don’t know, Jeff, if you would have time to address this today. But what would you say to the person who struggles with homosexuality who says, “Well, I never worshiped an idol. I’ve always believed in God. How can you say that this tendency or struggle or orientation”—that’s the way the world would say it—“that I have is a result of the judgment of God for my idolatry when I never worshiped idols?”

Jeff: Yes. I think that first of all, if you wanted to talk particularly to this person, you would say, “Well, look. Were you born converted? Or were you conceived converted? If you weren’t you had not only sinful tendencies, but actual sins that characterized your life. And you were an idolatrous person because you were seeking self.”

Don: Ah, good point.

Jeff: I mean, that’s how I would go with it. Secondly I would say that this is not a pattern that needs to be A. B. in someone’s life. Do you know what I mean? Just because

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somebody is an idolater doesn't mean that the person is a homosexual. This is a larger pattern of the degeneration of a society that has forsaken God. So for instance, that's why, when you get down to that list at the bottom at verses 28 and following, *“God gave them up to a debased mind,”*—*“God gave them up to a debased mind, to do what ought not to be done.”*

Transcriber's Note: ESV.

Jeff: And the interesting thing about that is that it is almost as if God gave them up to a disqualified mind. In other words they were disqualified in their thinking because it was futile and dark, to do what ought not to be done. In other words, it's kind of a word play there. He gave them up to their failure. So they were disqualified and He gave them over to their disqualification or to their failure.

And so they were filled with all manner—and this is where it comes on the back side. This is not just a one-to-one; this is a general pattern that one sees in a society that has forsaken God. But the other things that one sees in that society are from verse 28 and following. You see all sorts of things there.

However, what I would say is this. And just to give you a glimpse into future of these chapters, *“God gave them up to a debased mind, to do what ought not to be done.”* But by the time you get to Romans chapter 12 there's the renewal of the mind, right?, which is so key to our thinking when we think about Romans. But they did what was not approved by doing all of these things that are listed here in 28-29. And the idea then is that they are without excuse, without defense. They are without apologetic; they are without any kind of defense for their actions. And God will judge them; in fact God is judging them.

Well, we're over our time. And you see how much there is that's there; we just kind of skated over much of it. But it's okay. Unless you have things that you want to talk about we'll just take some things like that and move through them, and just give you a bigger sense of the picture of the passage.

Bishop: Would you say that Paul is describing a kind of collapse? And when we get to the distortion about sexuality—first of all its undue importance, secondly its unnatural form—it's that we're kind of modifying. We see a culture kind of hit the bottom, like the state we're in now.

Jeff: Yes. I know there's a guy by the name of Robert Gagnon from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. He wrote a paper about homosexuality. He argues in that book that homosexual sin is in the Jewish mind the most heinous of sins. And so he argues that it's a society at the bottom.

Bishop: We've gotten there.

Jeff: Yes.

Don: I also think that this really has a lot to say about this. People say, well, how can God hold a person responsible who has never heard of Christ and condemn him? Well, the key to that is in these opening verses. All Gentiles have sinned. We've sinned against natural revelation. And so even though the person has never heard the name of Christ, he is still culpable for his sin.

Jeff: Yes. The person who has never heard the gospel is going to be judged for his rejection of the Father, because in rejecting the Father he ultimately rejects the Son. But

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these verses are very clear. The person who has never heard the special revelation of God is held accountable for holding down the truth that’s revealed in the general revelation. So general revelation is enough to condemn a man, but it is not enough to save a man.

Ron: Earlier you were talking about natural theology as opposed to general revelation.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ron: I would think that general revelation would lead to natural theology. Otherwise He can’t condemn the Gentiles who have never heard. You sort of touched on natural theology. But you didn’t talk about that some people believe and some people don’t. Maybe sometime you can define it better; you don’t have to do it now.

Jeff: Yes. Well, natural theology would be the theology that is derived from general revelation. In other words, what can we know? Well, we can know that the creation is changing, and therefore there must be an unchanging Creator, right? We can know, like Paul says, that there is an all-powerful God behind this. If we look at the things we look at, there’s a Designer to it—those kinds of things.

Ron: But I would think that since we have some kind of a moral compass inside us that this would also be a part of natural revelation.

Bishop: Oh, absolutely.

Jeff: It is.

Ron: Okay.

Jeff: Thank you. I wish you’d have brought that up sooner; I totally forgot to mention that, because sinful man lives in an arena of revelation, right? He has the *sensus divinitatus*—the sense of divinity—in him that you just mentioned. You know, he’s got the external revelation of God. He has these things and he suppresses them in unrighteousness.

But the person who would deny natural theology would say that natural theology is theology that is just suppressed truth, because you’re never going to get to the Trinity, right? You’re never going to get to any of this. But we have special revelation which does interpret general revelation. And so there is no need for a natural theology. We have a theology given to us in the Scriptures that is proper. And that’s the way they would go in terms of their rejection of it. Does that make sense?

Ron: But that would still—

Jeff: So for instance we talked about the subject/object problem before. And I’m the subject and this chair is the object, and I can study the chair, and so on. But the relationship is one way, right?

But think about God and myself, right? If I’m the subject and God is the object of theology, the difference is that unlike the chair the object really becomes the subject. And I become the object, right? And there is no other relationship like that. And so when you think about it, I can’t just treat general revelation as if it’s something that can be studied like a chair.

Ron: I guess I just wanted to say that general revelation should lead to the investigation of special revelation.

Bishop: You’ve got it.

Jeff: It should if their minds weren’t futile and darkened.

Ron: Right.

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Jeff: That’s the problem. Well, let’s pray and let’s go here. Thank you for staying over. Father, thank You for this time. We pray that You’ll bless this time to us as we think more rightly about You and what’s going on in our world. We ask, Father, that You’ll bless us as we enjoy the renewal of our mind. And Father, we pray that You’ll do this for Christ’s sake. In His name we pray. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: Isn’t it interesting! If you look at Romans 12:1 and 2, it talks about the renewal of the mind.

Transcriber’s Note: Romans 12:1-2. *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”*

Jeff: But remember that in 3 and 4 it talks about the renewal of the mind so that we might enjoy great relationships with others. Look at it; it’s there.

Transcriber’s Note: Romans 12:3. *“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith”*

Jeff: So it’s interesting. There’s the unnatural relationship with God and the unnatural relationship with man. Then there’s the natural relationship with God and the natural relationship with man that ensues at the renewing of our minds. So it’s very fascinating.