

SERIES: IN THE HANDS OF A FAITHFUL GOD  
PART 2: GOD'S FAITHFUL WHEN WE'RE UNFAITHFUL

From Genesis 1 to Revelation 22 God reveals Himself to us as our loving, dependable, reliable gracious, and just God who deeply loves us and created us so that we could have a deep abiding relationship with Him. From Genesis chapter 3 on we see how unfaithful, unreliable, fickle, and self-centered God's human family has been. In our daily devotions it is painful to see just how much betrayal God's people have committed against Him, and His human family continues to do so today.

Even though this is true this is why God sent His only Son into the world. John 3:16-20 says, **"For God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. 17 God sent His Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through Him. 18 There is no judgment against anyone who believes in Him. But anyone who does not believe in Him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. 19 And the judgment is based on this fact; God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light for their actions were evil. 20 All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. 21 But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants."** From the moment Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, all of humanity has been cut off from God because of our sinful nature. The Father loved us so much He refused to let us stay alienated and estranged from Him. God sent Jesus so that we can have eternal life and live a life of love with Him and His family for eternity. With this being true there is a very painful truth we must all come to grips with. Jesus says there is judgment for those who reject Him. This person stands judged because he or she refuses to believe in the name of God's one and only Son. Already in need of a Savior before God's Son comes on His saving mission, this person compounds his or her guilt by not believing in the name of that Son. As with the arrogant critic who mocks a masterpiece, it is not the masterpiece that is condemned,

but the critic. Jesus says the person who disbelieves in the Father's one and only Son stands condemned already, and God's wrath remains on Him.

Last week I mentioned that Romans 1:16-17 is the leading proposition of the book of Romans. Would you please read along as I read the passage we're looking at today. You can read it from the screen or from your Bible or from your notes. I do want to recommend that you bring your Bible with you, and you can follow along as I speak. It is a great way to get familiar with your Bible--especially if you're not. Romans 1:16-32 **"For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes--the Jew first and also the Gentile. 17 This Good News tells us how God makes us right in His sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, 'It is through faith that a righteous person has life.' 18 But God shows His anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. 19 They know the truth about God because He has made it obvious to them. 20 For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see His invisible qualities--His eternal power and divine natures. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. 21 Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship Him as God or even give Him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. 22 Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. 23 And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles. 24 So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies. 25 They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator Himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. 26 That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. 27 And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this**

sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved. 28 Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, He abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. 29 Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. 30 They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents. 31 They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. 32 They know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too." To understand God's faithfulness to us when we're unfaithful it is important to know **how to understand God's wrath towards our rebellion against Him.**

## **I. GOD'S WRATH IS EXPERIENCED BECAUSE WE REJECT AND HOLD DOWN HIS TRUTH. 1:18**

Vs. 18 says, **"But God shows His anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness."** In vs. 17 Paul writes that in the Good News that Jesus Christ came and as being fully God He defeated satan, sin and human selfishness, and in the Good News it tells us how God makes us right with Him. In the Good News about Jesus the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. God's covenant faithfulness is presently being revealed. Now in vs.18 as part of God's covenant faithfulness Paul states that the wrath of God is being revealed. What is God's wrath? Many scholars from both sides of the aisle have wrestled for decades with this issue. N.T. Wright states, **"Since the great wickedness's of the twentieth century I would add what has happened so far in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have reminded us that unless God remains implacably opposed to the evil that distorts and defaces creation, not least humanity, God is not a good God."** For God to be a loving, just, righteous and faithful God there must be a corrective action on His part towards evil. For Paul, his thought on wrath is rooted in Scripture. Wright argues that **"The creator is neither a tyrannical despot nor an indulgent, laissez-faire absentee landlord, nor yet, for that matter, the mere inner**

or spiritual dimension of all that is. God is the creator and lover of the world. Our God has a passionate concern for creation and human in particular, that will tolerate nothing less than the best for them.” God’s anger differs from our anger. In the Dictionary of Biblical imagery the author states, “Expressions of God’s anger exhibit no loss of control. Rather, as an act of God’s will, His anger results in deliberate judgments against sin-actions appropriate to the situation and in keeping with His own character as holy and just.” Colin Kruse writes, “God’s wrath denotes His personal indignation towards human sinfulness.” Byrne writes, “The sense of divine wrath is bound up with the biblical conception of a personal God whose dealings with humankind are attended by an intense moral will. The wrath of God blazes out when that will, and specifically the love that lies behind it, is thwarted by human pride, rebellion, obstinacy or disloyalty.” I find this incredibly powerful. The Bible says that God shows His anger from heaven because people actually suppress the truth by their wicked thoughts and behavior. We suppress God’s truth by holding it down, holding it back and by restraining it so that it will not have God’s intended effect of blessing us and creating order, love and peace. By acting out the sinful attitudes and behaviors he will cover sinful humanity is actually restraining God’s reliability and trustworthiness. James Dunn writes, “The indictment here is that failure to acknowledge God as Creator results inevitably in a sequence of false relations toward God, toward man and toward creation itself.”

#### **A. God has made His truth known to us.**

One of the most often question that is asked by skeptics and seekers is this one: **What if God has not given a person a chance to know Him?** Paul answers this question in vs. 19-20. Paul argues that ever since the world was created, through His creation we see clearly His invisible qualities--His eternal power and divine nature.

#### **B. God reveals His eternal power and divine nature in creation.**

Paul's statement echoes the words of Psalm 19:1-4 **"The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display His craftsmanship. 2 Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make Him known. 3 They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard. 4 Yet their message has gone throughout the earth and their words to all the world. God has made a home in the heavens for the sun."** The Bible says that God's invisible qualities are revealed through creation, and that we are culpable for our failure to appreciate this. Humanity's rejection of acknowledging God's eternal power and divine nature is what results in His wrath being revealed.

### **C. To refuse to worship God leads to idolatry and a confused mind.** 1:21-23

These three verses show the reason for God's wrath. They knew God from His creation and could clearly see His eternal power and divine nature but refuse to worship Him and be grateful for who He is. Whenever this is a choice a human makes the Bible says you will begin to have foolish and moronic ideas of what God looks like. This causes a person's mind to become even more dark and confused. What this tells us is that God created us to be worshippers. If you do not learn to worship Father God in Spirit and in Truth then you will make gods of your own foolish choosing, and this is offensive and insulting to the only true Holy, Perfect and Just God. When a person chooses to turn away from worshipping the living God, He gives them over to become slaves to their sin. Paul writes in Romans 6:16 **"Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which lead to death, or you choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living."** What we can deduce from this verse because Paul says it throughout the letter to the Romans is that if you become a slave to sin, that will lead you to unrighteous living, which we will now look at.

## **II. HOW GOD REVEALS HIS FAITHFULNESS THROUGH HIS WRATH.** 1:24-32

**God allows us to exchange His glory for our own desires.**

Let's look at:

**Three exchanges humans make when they reject God:**

**A. When we exchange the truth of God for idols, God hands us over to the sinful desires of our hearts.**

Vs. 24 say, **“So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other’s bodies.”** This phrase, God abandoned them, is an echo from Psalm 81:11-12. This Psalm talks about how God delivered Israel from their captors in Egypt. God says, You cried out to me and I saved you. Then He warns them not to have foreign gods and not to bow down to them. Vss. 11-12 says, and listen to the echo, **“But no, My people wouldn’t listen. Israel did not want Me around. 12 So I let them follow their own stubborn desires, living according to their own ideas.”** The result for the pagan and the Jew is that the Creator allows all to reap what they have sown. The punishment not only fits the crime, but directly results from it as well. The word “abandoned them” is corollary to what happens when humans suppress God’s truth by their wicked behavior. Handing people over in the bondage of their sinful desires is God’s response to their refusal to honor Him or give Him thanks, and He turns them over to be immersed in their sinful desires. Notice in vs. 24 what Paul says. When we are driven by our shameful lustful desires it leads to doing vile and degrading things with each other’s bodies. Sexual addiction and slavery is always a leading outcome of idolatry. These shameful thoughts, feelings and behaviors can only be broken as we surrender ourselves to God’s love, grace, mercy, forgiveness and the power of His purity that is made available to us through the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit. When we get to Romans 8 and 12 we see God’s remedy. It is being filled with His Holy Spirit and the transforming power of God’s Word as we renew our minds so that our thoughts are saturated by the way God thinks.

**B. When we exchange the truth of God for a lie, God hands us over to fulfill our shameful lusts.**

**VS. 25-26 “They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator Himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. 26 That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other.”** Paul argues that those who worship images of their fellow creatures are not to be surprised that their own bodies are dishonored as result of their lusts and sinful desires. When a person swaps God’s truth for a lie and gives allegiance to that which is not God, it results in the second time Paul says “God gave them up. After the general comment about dishonoring of bodies, Paul now describes particular lusts of shame, passions that degrade human beings, and Wright states, **“Making them less than the full humans they were meant to be. Paul notes homosexual practice, both female and male, adding the comment that these who do these things receive in their own persons the reward of their error. Out of the many things Paul could have highlighted in the pagan world, he has chosen same-sex erotic practices, not simply because Jews regarded homosexual practices as a classic example of pagan vice, but more particularly because it corresponds, in his view, to what humans in general have done in swapping God’s truth for a lie.”** Two of the best books I can recommend if you would like to research more on what the Bible has to say about same sex relationships are **R.A.J. Gagnon’s THE BIBLE AND HOMOSEXUAL PRACTICE: TEXTS AND HERMENEUTICS** Nashville: abandon, 2001 pgs 229-303 and **R.B. HAYS, THE MORAL VISION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT** San Francisco: Harper, 1996 pgs 379-406. The Bible says when we exchange the truth of God for idols God hands us over to fulfill the sinful desires of our hearts. When we exchange the truth of God for a lie, God hands us over to fulfill our shameful lusts.

**C. When we exchange natural sexual practices for the unnatural, God hands us over to our shameless acts so we do what ought not to be done. Vss 27-32**

Now Paul says that the men did the same thing as women who are their natural counterparts. N.T. Wright gives the following reason for Paul's underlying logic of his argument. **“Those who worship the true god are, as Paul says elsewhere, renewed according to the divine image (see Colossians 3:10). When this worship is exchanged for the worship of other gods, the result will be that this humanness, this image bearing quality, is correspondingly distorted.”** Paul is most likely appealing to Genesis 1 where the Bible says that it is the male and female together that comprises the image of God. The Bible makes it clear that heterosexual intercourse is the Creator's intention for genital activity. Wright continues, **“Paul's point is that homosexual behavior is a distortion of the creator's design and that such practices are evidence, not of the intention of any specific individual to indulge in such practice for its own sake, but of the tendency within an entire society for humanness to fracture when gods other than the true one are being worshiped. The point is: Exchange your God for an idol, and you will exchange your genuine humanness for a distorted version, which will do you no good.”**

The five remaining verses, all one sentence in the Greek, paint the picture with strokes as broad and general as the previous two verses. The third “God abandoned them to their foolish thinking is a close punishment-and-crime analysis: Wright states, **“They did not see fit to have true knowledge of God, so God gave them over to an unfit mind. The unfit mind becomes the source of inappropriate deeds: Paul's view of sin, once more is that it is not the breaking of arbitrary divine rules but that it is subhuman or nonhuman behavior, deeds that are unfitting for humans to perform. Such people are full, Paul says twice, of all kinds of evil; like jugs filled to overflowing with noxious liquids, they are brimful of wickedness, ready to spill over at any moment.”**

**Close in prayer.**