**Grace to You** :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

**What's Wrong with America?**
Romans 1:18-32
80-112

Tonight we're going to be considering a subject that I think is on all of our hearts and I want, as I always would want to do, to take you to the Word of God and not just give you some kind of political or theological, philosophical speech. And I want to address the subject of "What's Wrong with America?"

In order to do that, I find myself drawn to Romans chapter 1, Romans chapter 1. And I would like to read for you, starting at verse 24 and reading down through verse 32. "Therefore, God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions, for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural. And in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the women and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same but also give hearty approval to those who practice them."

Three times in those verses you have the statement, "God gave them over," verse 24, verse 26, and verse 28. Another way to describe that phrase would be, "abandoned by God." One of the most tragic scenes on the pages of Scripture involves the strongest man who ever lived, the mighty man Samson, the original and legitimate and real, genuine Superman.

In Judges 16 verses 18 to 20 this is what we read, "When Delilah saw that he had told her all that was in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines saying, come up once more for he has told me all that is in his heart. And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands and she made him sleep on her knees and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then she began to afflict him and his strength left him. And she said, the Philistines are upon you, Samson. And he awoke from his sleep and said, I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." Then this line, "But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him. Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains and he was a grinder in the prison." He didn't know that the Lord had departed from him. Abandoned by God because of his sins. What a tragedy.

To the sons of Israel, God said, in Judges 10, "You have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen. Let them deliver you in the time of your distress." Not only was Samson abandoned by God but so was Israel.

Proverbs chapter 1 verses 24 to 31 records similar sentiment. "Because I called and you refused, I stretched out My hand and no one paid attention and you neglected all My counsel and did not want my reproof, I will even laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your dread comes. When your dread comes like a storm and your calamity comes on like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come on you, then they will call on Me but I will not answer, they will seek Me diligently but they shall not find Me because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would not accept My counsel, they spurned all my reproof, so they shall eat of the fruit of their own way and be satiated with their own desires."

To all, not only Samson, not only Israel, but to all who turned their back on the wisdom of God, they are left abandoned by God to eat the fruit of their own ways. In Hosea chapter 4 and verse 17 it is recorded that God said this frightening sentence, "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." Abandoned by God was Ephraim. Ephraim made its choice, God said let them go.

In the New Testament, I think of all the things that Jesus ever said about the Pharisees, this was the most frightening. He said to His disciples in Matthew 15:14 this, "Let them alone, they are blind guides of the blind. And when the blind lead the blind, everybody falls into the pit." Let them alone.

There comes a point in God's dealing with men and nations, groups of people, when He abandons them. And the consequence of that abandonment is they will eat the fruit of their own choices. If I were to simply answer the question: What's wrong with America? I would say God has abandoned America. And America is now feeding on its own choices. Chosen to sin, they have. Chosen to turn their back on God, they have. Chosen to reject the gospel, they have. Chosen to reject a biblical morality, they have. Chosen to disobey the clear commandment of God, they have. And God says, let them alone.

This isn't anything new for nations. In Acts 14:16 listen to these words, Paul said, "In the generations gone by, God permitted all the nations to go their own way." To go their own way. C.S. Lewis, writing in his book *The Problem of Pain*, wrote, "The lost," quote, "enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded and are therefore self-enslaved," end quote.

But when you consider all of the Scriptures that talk about being abandoned by God, none of them is as dramatic as the one I just read you. Here is the most graphic and comprehensive discussion of being abandoned by God anywhere in Scripture. And it is this concept of being abandoned by God that best explains the moral chaos and the moral confusion that we are experiencing in America. And

I'll go a step further and say we are not waiting for God's wrath, we are now experiencing it. And God's wrath in its initial form is simply to allow men to live with the result of their own choices, to take the restraint off, the protection. That's what is happening right before you in Romans 1.

Three times, as I told you, in verses 24 to 32 you have the phrase "God gave them over." Now that word can have a judicial sense; that is, making a judgment on a criminal and handing him over for execution or punishment. And I think that its intention here. Because the whole scene here is man found guilty before God. And God's wrath released, back in verse 18, against guilty men. The wrath of God then acts judicially to sentence sinners. And the first phase of that sentence is to just let the restraints go and let them go the way of their own choices, turning them over to the uninterrupted course and its effect that their sinful choices will produce.

To put it another way, they are deprived of restraining grace. Sin is so rampant in our country, it is so widespread, it is so tolerated by people in leadership and even people in the church, it is so widely tolerated it is pandemic, it is endemic, that is it is in the very fabric of our life, that I believe God has just taken away the restraining grace that might preserve our nation and has let our nation run to its own doom. Sin is both the cause and the effect. Sin and more sin and more sin and more sin results in more sin and more sin and more sin. Sin causes it; sin is the result of it. Wrath means that sinning people are allowed the freedom to sin more blatantly, as restraining grace is taken away.

Now let's look more closely. The first statement is in verse 24 and you'll see a progression. "Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them." The first thing God does in expressing wrath on a sinning society is to just let them go to their lusts. The first evidence of the wrath of God is not earthquakes, tidal waves, mass executions; it is just letting people go to operate in the lusts of their hearts to impurity. Moral perversion, sexual deviation, pornographic desire, allowed not only to exist but becoming popular, tolerated, being serviced by the society itself. And here what you have is pornographic hearts, lustful hearts. Man now abandoned by God operates only out of the passions of his impure heart.

And it doesn't stop there, verse 24 says, it goes to the body. The heart in its impurity and its driving lust will ultimately end up in the dishonoring of the body. It can't stop on the inside; it's got to show up on the outside. The heart is wicked and the heart is unrestrained and the body follows, because as Jesus said, "What comes out of the heart of man is what defiles him." Alan Johnson wrote, "In their freedom from God's truth, they turn to perversion. In the end their humanism, or man-centeredness, results in dehumanization of each other." And we've already seen that. Sex, alcohol, drugs, abuse, abortion, euthanasia, a low view of everyone else's life that leads to killings and murders, knifing, shootings, no sense of man being created in the image of God, no sense of humility, just egos gone wild and gone wild to fulfill uncontrolled and unrestrained passion that leads to dishonoring bodies in every direction.

Look at the second statement in verse 26. "For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions." Now we go a little deeper in to the level this corruption reaches. "For their women

exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural." First there is sort of this general category of unrestrained vice and we know that's a part of our culture, right? That is the driving force of our culture. That is the dominating force of our culture. You hate to admit it but the great cities of America are populated by men and women who live for nothing but the fulfillment of their lusts.

And then the second level is degrading passion. He shows you how far it goes. Vile desires, gross affections; so perverted, so degenerate and so unrestrained is the heart that it takes over the body and uses the body to do an unthinkable thing at the very depth of sin, and that thing is called homosexuality. And isn't it interesting that it starts with women here who really are the minority in homosexuality? A very small percentage of women are lesbians, compared to how many men are sodomites, or homosexuals. But he starts with the women. Why? Because he wants you to show...to see how deep the plunge is. You see, usually the last to be affected in the decline of the culture are the women. And that's his point. Proof that absolutely all virtue is gone, that the women have come to this base level.

And then in verse 27 he adds, in the same way the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts. And listen to this, and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. Can you see AIDS there? Of course you can, among other things. And see, that base inversion of God's created order — there is that principle again — abandons them to the consequence of their own iniquity. That's what it does. They're abandoned by God. God pulls back all restraining grace. There will be no mitigation of the consequence of their sin and their lives are destroyed morally, mentally, emotionally, medically, and ultimately physically and eternally.

Look at the third level that this abandoning by God plunges men toward, verse 28, "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer (Here's the third time this phrase is used.) God gave them over to a depraved (or reprobate) mind to do those things which are not proper." What is a depraved mind? A mind tested and found — are you ready for this? — useless. In other words, a mind that is disqualified for its intended purpose. In other words, they're so wicked and they are so base that their reasoning faculty is so corrupt it must be rejected. Their intellectual faculty, their conscience, is so destroyed that they do those things which are not — a better word than proper — moral, which are not fitting for men to do. The point is that this... The depth of their sin has reached the point where it has rendered their brains useless. They're not rational. They're not reasonable. They don't think straight.

When the chaplain at the medical center goes over there and sees that AIDS ward, he has to be startled by what he sees there. Must be many shocking things to see, none more shocking than when I was told that one of the problems they have in the ward is keeping the homosexual male nurses out of the beds of the AIDS patients. All rationality is gone at that point. And all ability to reason about life and choices and morality is gone. Those are the kind of people in our culture who are fast rising into positions of leadership and the Bible says they have a mind that is useless, useless.

And what comes out of this when it stretches across our culture? And it isn't just homosexuality. Look how broad it goes. Verse 29, "They are filled with unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful." I mean, you could take the time to go through all of that; unrighteous, wicked, greedy, envious, murderous, fighting, deceitful, filled with hate and intention to do evil to people, and so forth. That's how you define our culture.

And then the epitome in verse 32, "And they know the ordinance of God." They know that. How do they know that? Because the law of God is written where? In their hearts. They know the ordinance of God. They know what's right. "That the one who practices such things is worthy of death, but they not only do the same but they give hearty approval to those who practice them." They have no conscience. They have no fear. They are without reason, they are without understanding; they are like beasts, mindless. There is the lowest point of human descent.

That's all the way from the people living on drugs and living for sex on the street and the homosexuals to the sophisticated Yuppies who sit on the Phil Donahue Show and laugh at sexual deviation and moral perversion. You see, abandonment by God leads to all of this.

And I believe what we're experiencing in our country is nothing more than God just letting us go the way the nation has chosen to go. They chose their leadership, a man who advocates sin of this proportion, murder, and homosexuality. They get what they ask for. This I see as for the time God taking off His restraint and saying, "You want it, you got it."

Why is it that God abandons a society? Couldn't we say, "Well all societies are like this? I mean, you've got to expect this. This is the way people are. I mean, why would God abandon us in this situation when we need Him most?" And the answer comes in verses 18 to 23. Listen to this: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." Verse 19, "Because that which is known about God is evident within them, for God made it evident to them." You see, that's the problem. The problem is they had the knowledge of God and they rejected it.

I have to conclude that the wrath of God is already at work in our society. And I suppose I would have to say there's no surer, no clearer token of a society under the wrath of God than when that society refuses to define and hate sin; and on the other hand, when it tolerates sin and sinners completely. Listen, when a society reaches the point where it will not define sin, where it will not hate sin, where it will tolerate sin and tolerate sinners, but will not tolerate anger toward sin, that's a society under God's wrath. And that's the society we live in.

It isn't new. Schiller wrote, quote: "The history of the world is the judgment of the world." Great

statement; the history of the world is the judgment of the world. What does he mean? Nations rise and fall, they come and go, and that is the chronicle of God's operative wrath.

The plunge into unrestrained iniquity is especially offensive to God because, verse 18 says, "They suppress the truth." Literally it says, "Who are constantly attempting to suppress the truth by their ungodliness." There is God, God is, God exists, and God has divinely authored a spiritual, moral, and ethical standard that must be obeyed or there will be wrath. In the future we all know about that wrath. We're learning it in Revelation, aren't we? But also in the present; in the future spiritually and eternally, in the present temporally. But look at our society. We assault that standard, we ignore that standard. We reject that standard. We mock that standard. We do everything to suppress that standard. Whether it's in the legislative branch or the judicial branch or the executive branch, they now have joined the movement, haven't they, to suppress God's standard, God's truth. We want to tell every man that he is free to do anything he wants to do, the only morality we have is egalitarianism, and that is the right for everybody to do what everybody wants to do. That's the one moral value that our world would define.

And Paul says the problem with this is it is a blatant rejection of the law of God which has been given to man. It is not man in his ignorance; it is man in his rejection that brings the wrath of God.

Expanding on that reality then in verse 18, Paul lays out four specific reasons for God's wrath, and I'll just give them to you. I think you'll find them absolutely fascinating. Four specific reasons for God's wrath.

Reason number one is revelation. Reason number one is revelation. In verse 19 it says, "That which is known about God is evident within them, for God made it evident to them." In other words, God — listen to this — has inlaid the evidence of spiritual and moral truth, what is right and what is wrong, in the very nature of man's being. He has inlaid also in the nature of man's being the awareness that there must be a God and that that God must be powerful and wise and good and just. Man is not without the witness of divine reality and divine morality. Men can't plead ignorance, because entirely apart from Scripture, which is special revelation, God has through general revelation made Himself known.

And notice the phrase there in verse 19: "That which may be known of God." that simply means what is knowable. What is knowable about God, what we can know about Him is made available to us. Where is this knowledge available? Within them, within them, in the mind, in the soul, in the reason, in the conscience.

You see the very fabric of reasoning and understanding is made from the strands of the revelation of God. That's what Paul means over in chapter 2 of Romans and verse 14 when he says the Gentiles who don't have the written law do instinctively the things of the law because though they are not having the law they are a law to themselves. Why? They show, verse 15, the work of the law written

in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or also defending them.

Conscience, guilt, reason, a rational mind, those are faculties by which the proper conclusion is there is right and there is wrong and there is God. It's not obscure to believe in God, it's innate. It's readily apparent. It's not obscure to believe in right and wrong, it's innate. And just like when you wound your body you feel pain, when you wound that moral, rational soul, you feel guilt. It's normal to believe in God. It's common sense. The mind dictates there must be a God. And this is what He must be like.

Over in the book of Acts and verse 15 of chapter 14, just very important word there, Acts 14:15, Paul and Barnabas having an interesting time preaching in Lystra. "Men, why are you doing these things?" they say when these people want to come and grab them and make them gods. "We are also men of the same nature as you and we preach the gospel to you in order that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. (Now listen to this.) and in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways, and yet He did not leave Himself without (What?) witness, in that He did good and He gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

I mean, reason would tell you there is somebody sending the rain and somebody painting the sunsets and somebody making the flowers grow and somebody providing this plethora of foods, somebody making life happy, somebody bringing a precious, sweet, soft, tender, little baby in to the world, somebody inventing those immense and overwhelming palpitations of love from a man to a woman, somebody bringing the joy of music. The mind and the reason, the very fabric of the soul says there is a God and He is a creator and He is powerful and He is good and He is beautiful and He is wise. That's just woven in to the very fabric of reason.

In Acts 17 verse 23 we find Paul on Mars Hill talking to some philosophers and he follows the same path. He says, "You've got this altar here inscribed to `an unknown god.'" Well he camps on that and says, "Well let me tell you who He is." Verse 24, "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is the Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands." You see, he assumes something. He's going to evangelize a bunch of pagan philosophers but he assumes one thing, their rational minds must require a creator. That's his assumption. That's where he starts. He knows they believe that somebody made everything because not to believe that is irrational. Nobody times nothing equals everything is the equation of a moron. So the assumption is that they believe the effect has a cause. And so he assumes that and he starts with the God who made everything. Look at the effect; let me tell you about the one who made it. He says, "He isn't served with human hands," verse 25, "as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things and He made from one every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth." He designed the world and created everything in it, sorted out the nations as to where they are to be and their boundaries and their times, "in order that they should seek Him."

In other words, the very existence of a universe and an earth and boundaries and nations, creation, should drive people to seek who it is. "If they would grope for Him and find Him, though He's not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and exist as even some of your own pagan poets have said, we are also His offspring." See, even pagan theology said somebody made us, somebody made us. That points out the idiocy of evolution, that nobody made us.

That's his point. "Being then," verse 29, "the offspring of God we ought not to think the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, or an image formed by the art and thought of man." Now think about it, gentlemen, he's saying to these philosophers, you look at this entire universe and are you assuming that rock over there with a face on it made this? You chiseled it. Are you assuming that wooden statue over there made it? You formed it. You must assume that whoever made it is greater than it, pretty powerful stuff. That's just reason. He approaches those pagans on a rational basis because in the fabric of human reason is the obvious reality that this world demands a creator and it reflects something of His person in the creation.

Now that is why, go back to Romans 1, Paul says at the end of verse 20 that men are without what? Excuse, because, verse 20 says, "Since the creation of the world," since the very beginning when creation was first done, way back then, since the very start, “the invisible attributes of God, His eternal power, something about His divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made." In other words, it's the creation that tells the reason there is a creator so that men are absolutely without excuse.

And do you realize this is in ancient times even before the microscope and the telescope? Men weren't even able in those days to comprehend the macrocosm and the microcosm like we are today. That is what is so blatant about evolution. It is flat out blatant rejection of God. It has nothing to do with science. It defies the single, greatest, scientific principle, cause and effect. And it reflects an evil intent to pursue sin without responsibility. Even in those days they could look at the stars, they could look at the incredible arrangement of the petals on a flower, they could look at leaves on a stem, they could look at the cycle of water, they could see the mystery of human birth, the mystery of growth. They could see the glory of a sunrise and the glory of a sunset. They could understand the roaring and the rolling of the seas. They could understand the rush of the rivers and the trickle of a brook, the flight of a bird. They could understand that incredible transformation of a worm, a caterpillar, into a butterfly. Even then the heavens were declaring the glory of God and the firmament was showing them His handiwork. Even then the beasts of the field were giving Him glory.

But today it's even more potent, isn't it? I mean, think about it. We now know that birds navigate by the stars while they migrate. Birds with this little tiny brain, birds raised from eggs inside a building where they have never seen the sky can be released to flight and instantly orient themselves toward home. They can even be shown an artificial sky representing a place their species has never been and orient themselves to it in flight.

Archer fish shoot drops of water with great accuracy at insects for no other reason than the fun of it. They get their food like all the rest of the fish and nobody else has figured out why God had them

doing that just for the fun of it.

Do you know that mites occupy only one ear in a moth? Because if they occupied both ears, the moth couldn't fly. How do the mites know if somebody is over in the other one?

I love the bombardier beetles. They produce chemicals which mix perfectly and at the right moment explode in the face of their enemy. But the explosion never occurs prematurely to blow the beetle up.

You think about water. Water is lifted against gravity thousands of feet into the air, suspended until carried inland where it's needed. It's incredible. No earthly agency can lift water like that. God equipped the sun to do it; it's the sun that does it through the process of evaporation and the sun is ninety-three million miles away. And so it goes.

The very essence of a creator and something of His character is absolutely everywhere, everywhere. And for human reason to reject that, goes against the grain of everything and must be the blatant act of willful sin. And because of that, God gives them over and the mind they refused to use becomes the mind that is useless. That's judgment. That is judgment. And I believe that we are experiencing that kind of movement in our culture.

Men have experienced God, they have experienced His wisdom, His power, His goodness in every moment of their existence, and he says they rejected Him, they suppressed the truth.

Look at the second of these four reasons why God's wrath falls: Rejection, and we've already mentioned it, rejection. Men had the truth, men turned from the truth, verse 21, "For even though they knew God they didn't honor Him as God, or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations and their foolish heart was darkened." There it is again. They didn't use their minds right. And instead of thinking wisely, profoundly, sensibly, their thoughts became futile or empty and useless and their foolish heart became black. The light went out. Man finds God in creation. He finds God in reason. He suppresses it. He rejects God. He loves darkness. He plunges into darkness and the light goes out.

Donald Grey Barnhouse wrote this: "Will God give man brains to see these things? And will man then fail to exercise his will toward that God? The sorrowful answer is that both of these things are true. God will give a man brains to smelt iron and make a hammerhead and nails. And God will grow a tree and give man strength to cut it down and brains to fashion a hammer handle from its wood. And when man has the hammer and the nails, God will put out His hand and let man drive those nails through it and place Him on a cross in the supreme demonstration that men are without excuse."

They, Paul says, did not honor Him as God or give thanks. Man's problem is not that he can't recognize God; it is that he won't recognize God. For all the joy of life and all the beauty of life and all the life, laughter, all the pain of life, all the tears of life, all the thrills, the pleasure, the talent, sexual fulfillment, all the children, all the families, for all the things that God fills life with, He gets no thanks. And they become futile in their speculation. They get nothing but empty human ideas and they're running wild in our culture, aren't they? Isaiah said in Isaiah 47:10, "You felt secure in your wickedness and said no one sees me. Your wisdom and your knowledge, they have deluded you, for you have said in your heart, I am and there is no one besides me." Boy, does that sound familiar. I am the center of my world; no one sits in judgment on me. That's how stupid men have become because they would not allow their rational mind, where God had planted the knowledge of Himself and the knowledge of good and evil in their conscience, they would not allow themselves to follow that path, they rejected that. They have now become foolish in their speculations, they are empty, useless, self-gods and they have been sucked into the vacuum of their own emptiness. And nothing is there but darkness. Their foolish heart was darkened. Now they can't know God because the light went out. Wrath, because men received revelation. They had the opportunity. Wrath, because they rejected it.

Thirdly, rationalization. This is the third cause, rationalization; men insist they're doing fine. Verse 22, "They profess to be (What?) wise." They don't say, "Oh, woe is me, I'm in a pit. I've become an idiot, I've lost my sense. I can't find my way." No. They are... They've convinced themselves they're erudite. And the major rationalizations today are egalitarianism, freedom and psychology. And, you know, they think they're wise. It reminds me of the guy lying in the hospital bed who kept...he was in the mental ward and he kept saying, "I'm Napoleon, I'm Napoleon."

And the guy in the next bed after about three days of this said, "Who told you you're Napoleon?"

And he said, "God did."

And the guy said, "Oh no, I didn't."

It reminds me of the lady...reminds me of the lady who walked in to the psychiatrist's office with a duck on a string and said, "You've got to help my husband; he thinks he's a duck." What they assume they perceive isn't remotely related to reality.

When he says, verse 22, "Professing to be wise they became fools," he uses the word *mōrainō*. "Moron" we get from it, that's what it means. They think they're wise and they're morons.

But there's a fourth cause. In spite of the fact that man rejects revelation and fully rejects the God and the truth revealed because he wants no compunctions in his life, and in spite of the fact that he rationalizes that he's really very wise and everything is fine, he still will inevitably invent something that becomes the fourth cause, religion. He can't exist without some sense of religion. He's got to believe in something or someone. He's got to have some shrine he bows to so he creates his own god to accommodate his useless mind. Voltaire said, "God made man in His own image and man returned the favor."

Verse 23, "They exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for (Here's their religion.) an image in the form of corruptible man and birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures." Look at verse 25, same statement, "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is God blessed forever, amen." Look at verse 28, "And just as they didn't see fit to acknowledge God any longer."

All of those say they wanted to get rid of the true God, the incorruptible God, the real God, and the truth of God, and in the place of God they wanted to make their own religion full of lies. They wanted to worship the creature rather than the creator. They did not see fit to acknowledge God. You see, what you have to understand is man does not rise...he does not ascend from the muck of paganism and ignorance to the truth of God. He falls from the truth of God into the slime of religion. Religion is not man at his highest. Religion is man at his lowest. He's down at the bottom when his willful rejection of the true God has allowed him to invent false gods to accommodate his own life.

In 2 Kings 17, verse 14 it says, "The people didn't listen, they stiffened their necks, like their fathers who didn't believe in the Lord their God and they rejected His statutes and His covenant, which He made with their fathers and His warnings which He warned them. And they followed vanity (or emptiness) and became vain and went after the nations which surrounded them, concerning which the Lord commanded not to do like them and they forsook all the commandments of the Lord their God and they made for themselves molten images." That's exactly what happens. You start at the truth of God and you descend into the muck of religion. Religion is man at the pits. It is the ultimate insanity. Religion is the ultimate insanity. It is the wickedness of man rejecting God and creating non-gods. They may be unsophisticated idols; they may be the gods of our culture, humanistic gods, materialistic gods, evolutionary gods. Maybe the gods of self and sex, it may be the goddess of Mother Nature or the new religion, eco-feminism. Everything from the Roman eagle in ancient time to the spotted owl, from the golden bulls of Egypt to the whale and dolphin gods of today, from the worship of a stick to the worship of the earth; from aboriginals to environmentalists, pantheistic worship to some little tiny god that a man holds in his hand, from eco-feminism to Islam.

So is it any wonder that as a society we are struggling with an ethical moral system? How can we have an ethical moral system when there's only one in the universe and we've abandoned it? And when you abandon it, as verses 18 to 23 describe, then verses 24 to 32 tells you if you abandon God what? He'll abandon you and just take off restraining grace.

You say, "Is there any hope for America?" Well the hope for America would be the same as the hope for any people, first of all, a return to God as Creator. God is Creator and Lawgiver. And if this nation does not return to God as Creator and Lawgiver, the wrath will continue.

I want to close with a text of Scripture and then an illustration. The text is in Psalm 81 verse 11, "But My people didn't listen to My voice and Israel did not obey Me, so I gave them over to the stubbornness of their hearts to walk in their own devices." That's it, isn't it? If they wanted it, they got it.

But then this, verse 13, "Oh, oh that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways, I would quickly subdue their enemies and turn My hand against their adversaries. Those who hate the Lord would pretend obedience to Him." In other words, it would become so popular that people would fake being spiritual.

And then verse 16, "But I would feed you with the finest of the wheat and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you." There's a promise, isn't that? God says I'll let you go but I can come back if you'll turn to Me. The first point of turning is to turn to God as Creator and Lawgiver. And once you affirm that, then His law becomes your standard.

One of the fascinating things that I saw in Africa when I visited there were...was huge ant colonies. And when I say huge, I mean you can't believe how big these ant hills are. You think of an ant hill as a little deal like this...I'm talking fifteen yards long, you know, twenty feet high, huge, all over everywhere, massive things. And there's a species of ant that lives in some parts of Africa, that lives in these subterranean tunnels and they go way down into the earth and they go way up, they usually pile them up around some kind of a tree. Down in the subterranean part of these things, I understand, is where they put the young ants and they shelter them there, and that's where the queen is housed. And the queen is in charge of this massive millions of little insects.

And they tell us that the workers go on their way and they have to forage for food and they go out to distant places and they come back with all the stuff the whole colony needs to eat. It is said that if when the workers are away the queen is molested, the workers, even though they're far away from the nest, become immediately nervous and uncoordinated because there's some kind of connection between them and the queen. If she's killed, it says they would become frantic, rush around aimlessly and die out in the field somewhere.

And what they've concluded is that there's some kind of radar device that works between this one queen and every one of these ants. If she's killed, they are instantly disoriented and a frenzy takes place that ends in death. Frankly, I can't think of a better parallel to what we've seen in Romans 1. When man believes there is no God, all sense of orientation is lost and he is in a mad frenzy that ultimately will end in death.

There's hope, you have to pray for that. If our nation will turn back to the Creator and the Lawgiver who is the true God and submit to His Word, He will bless us. If not, the wrath will continue to unfold.

Father, we are so grieved as we look around us at this time in our history. We can think back, it must have been so different in the early days of the founding fathers who wanted so much to make sure that everyone knew there was a God and that God had given a law and His law alone could govern man. And here we are, something over 200 years later and the whole nation is plunging into an abyss of blackness with minds that are absolutely useless, trying to solve massive, far-reaching problems of iniquity without a standard and really being given the curse of their own sin, more sin and more sin and more sin, unrestrained. We see Your wrath and all we can do is plead with You that You would be gracious to Your people and that You would open their hearts to saving truth, that You would save our leaders, that You would save them from their sins and bring them to the foot of the cross, that they would bow the knee to Jesus Christ, and that the Word of God could again become the authority in this land as it reflects the Word of the Creator. For, Father, unless that happens, many shall continue the plunge into the darkness from which they cannot recover. We remember what You said to the society before the flood, "My Spirit will not always strive with man," there comes a time when grace runs out. Lord, before that happens in this land we can only ask that in Your mercy You would call out a remnant of such proportion and devotion that they might begin to bring a new...a new sense of direction, by turning the hearts of this people toward God, toward You. We pray tonight, Lord, for anyone in this congregation who is in that death frenzy and disorientation because they are alienated from You that You would turn them, that they would look and see You the Creator, the Lawgiver, the Redeemer, who in Christ has purchased their life for time and eternity. And we ask this only that You may be glorified in Your Son's name. Amen.

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