

YOU GO BOYFRIEND! YOU GO GIRLFRIEND! ROMANS 1:18-32

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

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Last time we were together, we talked about the contents of the Gospel. We said that the word Gospel means Good News and the Good News is that God offers salvation freely to all whom will accept it. There is no class, racial, gender distinction, no economic distinction, and no educational requirements.

The Good News is that God offers salvation freely to all whom are willing to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Now let's keep in mind that Paul was writing this letter to the church in Rome. The Devon Church consisted of both Jewish Christians, and Christians that came from many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The church found itself in the capital city of the most powerful empire in all history and for the most part, it should be easy for us to understand their culture.

The circumstances in Rome, and the entire Roman Empire, are much the same as we are living in today. There was peace throughout the Roman Empire and citizens were allowed to travel anywhere, without much fear. People had a lot of free time to pursue education, philosophy, religion, and entertainment.

Like the people in Rome, people of our culture don't have a concept of needing to be saved. In other words, people watch television, go to movies, go on vacations, and think they are o.k. Their only concern is how to get more pleasure out of every day. So, if we approach most people today and say, "There is Good News, God wants to save you," their response will be something like, "Saved from what? I don't need salvation."

So you see, in the next three chapters of Romans Paul anticipates this very response. He is going to demonstrate that all people need God's salvation, whether they are willing to admit it or not.

Now in order for us to really feel the full force of his argument, let's put ourselves in the shoes of the church in Rome. Paul has already said that the Good News is primarily offered to the Jews, and then to the rest of the world. He will argue that the bad news also applies to both the Jews and Gentiles.

Think of it this way, some of us here today have been raised in the church, and some us were not raised in religious homes. The point Paul will make is that the bad news applies to all of us equally. He will start by demonstrating that the pagan culture of Rome and our United States, as well as all other cultures are in desperate need of the Good News. Then next week will see him deal with moral and religious people for they are also in desperate need of God's Good News. He will end the section with the bold statements, "All have sinned and fallen short of God's holy standard." In other words, all of us stand guilty before God. That is indeed bad news.

As I was studying the passage, I fell asleep and had this weird dream. I dreamt that St. Peter invited me up to heaven to see how sins were calculated. I saw thousands of clocks on the walls everywhere. The strange thing was that all the clocks were ticking at different rates, some slow, and some fast. Further, I noticed that each clock had a nameplate, with a name engraved on it. Naturally, I asked St. Peter what the significance of the clocks was. He informed me that each clock was designed to keep track of an individual still on earth. Each time the person, represented by the clock, committed a sin, the hands on the clock made a complete revolution. Upon closer examination I discovered my clock wasn't there. I asked St. Peter where my clock

was. He went to the secretary and asked her. She said, “Oh, that clock. We moved it into our office. We’re using it as a fan.” I’m sure that those of you who really know me know that it can’t possibly be true. Right?

I’m really glad for passages such as this, because it gives me an occasion to reveal a side of God we don’t often think about but I want you to think about this. You all know that I don’t pick certain passages to preach. I preach through books of the Bible, starting at the first chapter, and then preaching verse by verse throughout the whole book. I have been here for 12 years and I have preached through over a third of the entire Bible. For the most part, you have heard of the extravagant love of God. Very few times have you heard hell, fire and brimstone preaching? That should give you an idea of the fact that the primary way God approaches us is through His love.

However, there are certainly enough passages in the Scriptures to remind us the God gets angry as well. In fact, as this morning’s passage and next week’s passage will demonstrate, God does not tolerate sin. We will see how our country and culture have deluded themselves in thinking that we are blessed by God but in reality, we have been cursed by God. I don’t know about you, but passages such as this one give me the willies. Think about this, **it is really frightening to me to think that we can push God to the point where He says to us, “Go on and do whatever you want to do.”** In other words, there is a point in our lives that we rebel against God so much that He in essence says, “Go do what you want I’m tired of dealing with you.” It is almost as if God is so fed up with us insisting on doing things our own way that He says, “You go boyfriend! You go girlfriend! You do it your way.” I don’t know about you, but that frightens me.

I. WHY ALL THE BAD NEWS? (Vs. 18-21)

Last time, we heard about the Good News. This morning we are going to hear a lot about the bad news. In verses 18-21, the Apostle Paul explains the answer to “Why all the bad news?” Lets me state up front what the upshot of all the bad news is: **the bad news is that, because we reject God and His commands, most of humanity will spend eternity in hell.** Think for a moment about that statement. Most of our families, our neighbors, most of the people we work with, play with, go to school with, meet everyday, are going to spend an eternity in hell. Our immediate knee jerk response is “God is a loving God. Jesus is so kind and compassionate.” Jesus talked a lot about hell. He described it as a horrible place where people are tormented day and night for all eternity. Can you imagine suffering and being tormented forever, without rest, for all eternity, with no hope of it ever ending?

Many commentators are embarrassed to talk about the wrath of God. We just finished the book of Genesis. Do you remember when God became angry at how corrupt the world had become that he destroyed all of human life except Noah and his small family? Have we forgotten how he punished Sodom and Gomorrah, wiping out all the people? If you have any doubts, let me read to you a quote from Revelation, the last book of the Bible.

Revelation 20:11-15 & 21:5-8

“And I saw a great white throne, and I saw the one who was sitting on it the earth and sky fled from his presence, but they found no place to hide. I saw the dead; both great and small, standing before God’s throne and the books were opened, including the Book of Life. The dead were judged according to the things written in the books, according to what they had done. The sea gave up it’s dead, and all the graves gave up the dead in them and then they were all judged according to their deeds and death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the

second death --- the lake of fire. Anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire. ... And then the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making all things new!" Then, he said to me, "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true" and he also said, "It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega --- the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give the springs of the water of life without charge! All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children. But cowards who turn away from me, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, and those who practice witchcraft, the idol worshipers, and all liars --- their doom is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. This is the second death."

A. THE DENIAL (V. 18)

So the bad news is that God's judgment is on all of secular society. Verse 18 describes denial. We often wonder how our culture could be so blind to God's commands on our life, this verse seems to say that people have to make a conscious decision to ignore God and suppress the truth. Look at the characteristics of people who suppress the truth they are godless and wicked. Godless means that they reject God and being wicked means that they mistreat other human beings. Now here is the phrase I want us to hold on to as we study through this passage. "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven: We want to know how God's wrath is being revealed but for now let's deal with the following concept. We always hear people say, "I don't believe in a god that sends people to hell. I don't believe in an angry God." How do we feel about a God that doesn't get angry? Do we really want to worship a God that doesn't get angry about child abuse? Do we really want to worship a God that doesn't get angry with the people who perpetrated 9-11? Do we really want to worship a God that doesn't get angry at social injustices?

The fact is we worship a God who does become angry at sin. He becomes angry when we worship other gods, and He becomes angry when we mistreat one another. We worship a passionate God and to deny that is a fatal mistake, in fact, it is an eternal mistake.

B. THE TRUTH (Vs. 19-20)

Verses 19-20 lay out for us the truth. I'd like to get into a long discussion about natural revelation and that is the concept that God reveals Himself in nature and in the created order. However, that would take too much time so let me give you a summary of what I think Paul means here. He is saying that no one is ignorant. When we sin, it is almost always intentional and rebellious.

God built the universe in a way that people should recognize that God is present and active and all creation reveals God's eternal power. We ought to see that an all powerful, all knowing, and ever present God created and sustains the universe. Further, God reveals His divine nature to us by creating us in His image. For example, we all recognize the concepts of love, righteousness, justice, beauty, intellect, order, significance, and design. We share in these qualities of the divine nature so we really do know what is right, and what is wrong.

I know I have used this example before, but I will quickly use it again. When I taught philosophy in college, I would lay out the only two possibilities for the origin of the universe. The two options were 1. The democreation view, saying that matter existed in the form of molecules, and randomly bumping into each other formed the universe and human beings, as we know it. 2. God existed in the beginning and created all that is. When I ask them to look at the universe, human beings, and all their characteristics, and then give me the most logical explanation, they always, without exception say it is much more rational and logical to believe in

a God that created the universe. Then when I ask them why they don't seek to know or follow God, their answer is almost always, "Because that would require me to change the way I live."

My experience is much like Paul's. The people I come in contact with do know right from wrong, and they suspect there is a God, but they would rather not think about those things because it would put a damper on the way they want to live and, I am also sad to say that I have seen so-called Christians distort their view of God to justify the way they live. People can know God and people can know what God expects of us however, most of us would like to live the way we think is right and desirable no matter what God thinks. Paul says, we are all without excuse.

C. THE RESULTS (V. 21)

Verse 21 describes the sad results of suppressing the truth. What happens when we reject God? What happens when we reject His commands? What happens when we become self-centered and seek pleasure rather than holiness? We become stupid. Look at the words in verse 21. Their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts became darkened. In other words, their thinking led to hopelessness and the conscienceless became dull. Anything goes, but there is not much satisfaction to be found. People today are more sexually promiscuous, power hungry, thrill seeking, money hungry, and pleasure seeking, but more empty and hopeless than ever before. Our society values unrestrained sex, power, money, youth and the wholehearted pursuit of pleasure. It has chosen to seek pleasure rather than truth. It has chosen to be proud rather than humble. It has chosen to be rebellious rather than submissive. There is no thankfulness to, or acknowledgment of God. Our society has rejected God and His commands and is in chaos as a result, without answers to the AIDS problem, the unwed mother problems, the divorce rate and broken home problems. Our society has no answers for racism and social injustice. We look to

politicians and educators, all who have rejected God and are characterized by futile thinking and foolish darkened hearts. Listen to this stunningly bad news; **because we reject God and His commands, most of humanity will spend eternity in hell.**

II. WHAT EXACTLY IS ALL THIS BAD NEWS? (Vs. 22-31)

I don't know about you, but that both frightens and saddens me but what frightens me even more is how God reveals His wrath and how God acts when He is angry. Verses 22-31 answer the question, "What exactly is all this bad news? I don't want you to miss this. **The immediate bad news is that God releases us and allows us to enslave ourselves to degrading lifestyles that lead to hell.** There comes a point in time when, if we insist on doing things our own way, God will stop holding us back from hurting ourselves. Watch the pattern throughout these verses: Human beings will exchange something of God's for something of the world. As a result, God will give them over to some sinful desire. Now, pay careful attention to this word "give them over." It is not a passive word it is active and if we insist on rebelling against God, not only will he let us go, ... He gives us a helping push in that direction. I think this has a lot to do with the language where it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. It's not just that God is going to let us coast down the hill to disaster He'll give us a little push along the way.

A. ENSLAVED TO DEGRADING IMMORALITY (Vs. 22-24)

Verses 22-24 demonstrate how we become enslaved to immorality. The first sin mentioned here is idolatry. People exchanged the worship of the One True and Living God, for idol worship. Even though some of the nature religions worship mother earth, father moon, birds, animals, trees and even Mother Nature, for the most part, our culture does not worship idols in the traditional sense of the word. However, since the enlightenment, and into our

postmodern world, we do worship ourselves. Every person's opinion is important and every person's take on the truth is just as valid as one another's.

Let me take a moment to prove that many of us are idol worshippers. To worship God is to love Him, serve Him, and obey Him, we learn all about His designs for life in the Bible. Where do you get most of your ideas for life, for what's desirable and acceptable?

Let me throw in one more piece of data. Look at verse 24. What is the penalty for idolatry? God hands people over to sexual immorality for the degrading of one another's bodies.

I have been a pastor for over 20 years, 10 of those involved with teenagers. One question that seems to pop up over and over again is, what physical contact is allowed while dating? My answer today is the same as it was 20 years ago. None. As far as I can tell, none of them have ever listened to me. Why? Because they are getting their information from television. Where in the Bible does it command teenagers who are dating to hold hands, to kiss, grope one another, or to have sex? I'm pretty well read in the Bible, and I can't find that in fact I find the exact opposite, the bible encourages us towards total moral purity.

One again, we get our ideas of dating from television. Now since I'm not a legalist, and since I don't often make these kinds of statements, I may shock some of you. If you are a Christian, you should not be watching soap operas. If you are a Christian, you should not be watching sex in the City, MTV, or most of what's on television. In fact, I could probably make an argument for not watching television at all. Why? Because that is where we start to get our ideas for what is right and desirable behavior.

Last month on Oprah, she had 8th grade boys and girls telling her that they had parties where they engaged in oral sex. They thought there was nothing wrong with it. They didn't consider it sex, and they thought it was a great past time. How can people get so confused as to

this? The Bible portrays intimacy as sharing the hopes, dreams, fears, successes, thoughts and feelings with one another. It has nothing to do with sex. Think about this you young people, how much talking can you do with someone else's tongue or genitals in your mouth?

Now I'm sorry I have been a little crude but look at the last phrase of verse 24. If we follow culture and start to worship the television gods, and ourselves then God will turn us over to sexual immorality and we will be degrading our own bodies and one another's bodies.

I'll say it again. How much physical contact should there be in dating relationships?
NONE!

B. ENSLAVED TO DEGRADING PASSION (Vs. 25-27)

Verses 25-27 demonstrate how we become enslaved to degrading passion. Again, it's another case of idolatry. People exchange the truth of God for a lie. They worship created things rather than the creator. The Apostle Paul uses the sin of homosexuality and lesbianism to make his point but if we simply focus on this, we will miss his point. Paul chooses this because homosexuality was pretty acceptable and prevalent in the ancient world. In fact, many of the Roman Emperors around that time were homosexual. God's design for sex was heterosexual, monogamous, and for marriage. God created marriage to be exclusively between one man and one woman and sex was to be kept within the bounds of marriage. All sex outside of marriage is in essence idolatry. Heterosexual sin is just as condemned as homosexual sin.

Even though this passage is not primarily centered on homosexuality, let me make a few quick comments about it. I would be happy to discuss this at length with any of you who wish to discuss it. First of all, homosexuality is not the sin. Let me explain this. It is possible to conceive of a person born with homosexual tendencies. After all we live in a sinful world under the domination of Satan. It is also possible through no fault of their own because of the way they

were raised, for a person to have homosexual tendencies and I would guess that there are also people born with a homosexual bent. So the sin is not to have this bent or to have these desires just like it is not a sin for a heterosexual to have desires towards the opposite sex.

If a homosexual lives celibate because he believes that God's design for sex is to take place in the context of only heterosexual marriage, then that person is honoring God just as an unmarried heterosexual must remain celibate in obedience to the same command.

The problem comes when either of these people disregards what God says, and acts out on their feelings and desires alone. For example, if the homosexual says, "I don't care what the Bible says. I was made like this and I will celebrate it and act out on it. Homosexual sex is desirable and acceptable." In fact, some homosexuals try to claim to be Christian while rebelling against this principle. Heterosexuals do the same thing when they try to justify having sex outside of marriage, by redefining sex. We saw that clearly in the life of President Clinton.

Look what the punishment is in verse 26. God gave them over to their shameful lusts. God said, "Go ahead and pursue immorality." Believe me, I have seen all sorts of justification for all sorts of perverted sex and the sad thing is, people actually seem sincere. Our culture has become enslaved to degrading passions. Sexually transmitted disease has not slowed us down, AIDS has not slowed us down, and teenage pregnancies have not slowed us down. Broken marriages, sexual addictions, pornographic addictions, none of it has slowed us down. We as a society continue to degrade our own bodies and one another's bodies and the sad thing is, even we in the Christian church find ways to justify watching things or doing things we know offend God.

C. ENSLAVED TO DEGRADING THINKING (Vs. 28-31)

This all leads to degrading thinking in verses 28-31. We exchange the knowledge God gives us for our human reasoning and rationalization and so God gives us over to a depraved mind. Let me ask all of us a question how much time do we spend reading the Bible, religious books, listening to Christian radio or watching Christian television, compared to how much time we spend reading secular novels, watching secular television, or going to the movies, entertainment, etc? My guess is that we spend more time with secular entertainment than we do with God.

Well, we reap what we sow. Look at verses 29-31. These sins are listed several times in Paul's writings and also in the rest of the Bible. I am now going to make some general comments. The first group of sins, wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity all stem from a lack of fear of God. The second set, envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice stem from a lack of contentment. We are never satisfied and we always want more, especially what someone else has. The third set of sins, gossip, slander, God-hating, proud, arrogant, overbearing, looking for evil, and disobedient, all stem from a lack of humility. I want my way and I'm right. The fourth set of sins paint a nice picture of people whose lives manifest the wrath of God. They are senseless, without brains, they are faithless, without honor, they are heartless, without love and they are ruthless, without compassion.

I don't know about you, but I can't help reading through these lists of sins we have gone through this morning, and finding myself. It is frightening because **the immediate bad news is that God releases us and allows us to enslave ourselves to degrading lifestyles that lead to hell.** My prayer is that our hearts are softened to hear God's word and repent because there is a lot of bad news here.

III. HOW MUCH BAD NEWS IS THERE? (V. 32)

Verse 32 answers the question, “How much bad news is there?” The answer is, **there is enough bad news to last all humanity, an eternity.**

A. GOD’S JUDGMENT (V. 32a)

The first phrase in the verse describes God’s judgment. I want us to fully understand the ramifications of this passage. God’s wrath usually has to do with the judgment in the end times. In other words, He will send people to hell on the day of the final judgment. That’s what the word death means here. It means to be eternally separated from God with no hope of reconciliation it means to suffer eternity in hell and it refers to our eternal destiny. So when God hands us over to our own lusts, passions, and desires, we are actually preparing ourselves to live in hell for eternity.

B. A Bad Response (v. 32b)

The second phrase describes a bad response. Even though life is not really working for people. They are empty they are afraid, frustrated, lonely, and hopeless they refuse to repent and search for God. Instead, they immerse themselves even more into their degrading immorality, degrading, passion, and degrading thinking.

C. A Worse Response (v. 32c)

But a worse response is found in the last phrase. They say that misery loves company, and so they will find others who think and act like they do it makes it much easier to justify their sinful behavior. They don’t want to hang around righteous people, because that lifestyle rebukes the way they are living. But the really sad thing is, these rebellious people try to convince other people to live this type of degrading lifestyle as well. It’s like they are not satisfied to degrade themselves, they have a need to teach and degrade others.

Believe me, **there is enough bad news to last all humanity an eternity.**

The Apostle Paul has now addressed those who live according to the prevailing culture. It is really bad news to understand that many of us have enslaved ourselves to immoral, wicked, and harmful lifestyles. The person who has a big mouth is just as guilty as a sex offender. Paul says that if our lives are characterized by any of these sins, then there is a lot of bad news waiting for us and the worst news of all is that God has helped us on our way. **It really is frightening to me to think that we can push God to the point where He says to us, “Go do whatever you want to do.”**

I really hope that all of us have heard this message this morning, because if we continue to sin without repenting, God has made a way for sin to overtake us and enslave us.

Listen to how James Stewart describes the enslavement process. “Every time he sins, ... he is making himself less capable of realizing what sin is, ... less likely to realize that he is a sinner, ... for the ugly thing, ... the really diabolical thing about sin ... is that it perverts a man’s judgment and it stops him from seeing straight.

Now I said this morning that the bad news is that in our natural state, we are headed for eternal destruction and that our present lives are preparing us for that eternity in hell.

God allows us to enslave ourselves. However, do you remember how we described salvation last time? For the Apostle Paul, salvation meant that God rescued us and changed our eternal destinies. As we place our faith and trust in Jesus, then God changes our eternal destinies from death to life.

This morning we celebrate communion, the act by which God accomplished this for us.

²⁶“For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord’s death until he comes again. ²⁷So if anyone eats this bread or drinks this cup

of the Lord and is unworthy, that person is guilty of sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord. ²⁸That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking from the cup. ²⁹For, if you eat the bread, or drink the cup unworthy, not honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself. ³⁰That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died. ³¹But if we examine ourselves, we will not be examined by God and judged in this way, ³²but when we are judged and disciplined by the Lord, we will not be condemned with the world."

I Corinthian 11:26-32