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The Roman Road: Suppressors of the Truth

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Romans 1:18-25 (ESV)

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Well, we continue on the Roman road, walking through Paul's letter to the believers in Rome. As we encounter today, some people who Paul refers to as suppressors of the truth. There are some passages in the Bible that if a preacher is given a choice to speak on, teach on, preach on, they would rather not preach on them. And this portion of Paul's letter is one of those. And so to bring it to you, I did some back work myself for the passion to bring this text to you. And I went to the book of Acts, and I looked at Paul and his passion and his mission and his work before God and his calling and his understanding of his responsibility. In Acts chapter 20, he says this in verse 20. He says to the elders from the church in Ephesus, 'You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you, but have taught you publicly many things. And I've declared to both the Jews and the Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.'

In the passage we're looking at today will be an explanation of why Paul declared these things, that people must turn to God in repentance and have faith in the Lord Jesus. And then he said,

'I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you, for I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole counsel, the whole picture of what God has told us in his word.' And then I was reminded by what James wrote to people who teach the Bible when he said, 'Not many of you should become teachers.' And he said this because you know that those of us who teach will be judged more strictly. And then Paul's encouragement to young Timothy, a man with the same name as me, he said this in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge. Preach the word. Be prepared in season and out of season, correct rebuke. Encourage with great patience and careful instruction. Paul said all these things, he did all these things in love. I mean, we are to speak the truth in love. And we see this probably from Paul's most famous passage of Scripture when he talked about love and he talked about love, being patient and kind and not envying and not boasting. Not being arrogant or rude doesn't insist on its own way. It's not irritable or resentful, but it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, and it rejoices in or with the truth. We speak the whole counsel of God in love and in truth.

And Jesus said the same thing when you know the truth, the truth will set you free. Truth corresponds with that which is real. And then he said further, and we know this from Jesus words, he is the truth. And so when he sets us free, when the Son sets us free, we're free indeed. And His word is truth. So we get into this portion of the letter that is the bad news of why we need the good news. And Paul begins the body of his letter saying, 'For the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.' We're going to break this down. Paul begins talking about the wrath of God. It's not a popular topic in our world. Many people try to discredit it, but he's saying there is a wrath that is from God that is currently being revealed from heaven here on the earth. Now he's going to talk about a different kind of wrath. There are two kinds of wrath, but they are both from God. And just so we're on the same page together, I want to give a working definition of what wrath is.

My family sometimes jokes around with one another when we're a little frustrated with each other or something comes up, we say, 'Feel my wrath.' We just kind of. And when my wife says it, it's kind of cute. Wrath is this justifiable anger, indignation, or violent passion? The word here is actually a Greek word 'orge.' So it would be the 'Orge' of God. And this is a passionate, justifiable indignation that brings about or stirs up some sort of action that leads to a consequence. And Paul now is going to say that the wrath of God, this passionate indignation, is operating in two different ways. The one he's mentioning here is a wrath. That is a current wrath that is being revealed in the world today. And then starting in Romans two,

he's going to begin to talk about a future wrath from God that is being stored up. It's Romans chapter two, verse five, where Paul speaks of a wrath from God that people are literally storing up against themselves for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgments will be revealed and they are storing this wrath up for themselves, because, he says, specifically because of their stubbornness and unrepentant hearts.

I want you to picture a dam of water. If you've ever been to the Hoover Dam in the United States, it's a huge dam that was built there. And dams and rivers, they stop up the water, and then the water just stores up behind dams. And that water can be released frequently. It's designed so that it can be released at any time or every once in a while, you'll hear of a dam being broke in the world somewhere, and the water just unleashes. That was all stored up there. Paul says. There's a certain kind of wrath that's being stored up in heaven by people against themselves, waiting for the day of God's righteous judgment. That's a future wrath. This is not the wrath Paul is speaking of in Romans one. He's speaking of a different kind of wrath. We might refer to it as a passive wrath or an abandonment wrath that is being revealed from heaven right now. It's in the present. It's in the world. This is a wrath from God being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and unrighteousness or wickedness. Godlessness is a word that in the Greek is spelled as 'asebeia,' and it literally means an attitude of irreverence towards God. So Paul is saying that there are people who carry around an attitude in their hearts that is irreverent towards God, and his wrath is being revealed from heaven against this kind of attitude, a godless attitude. And if you think about it, there are godless attitudes everywhere in the world.

Many institutions besides people are trying to eliminate God from the picture, have an irreverence towards God. And then wickedness or unrighteousness is referring to, uh, behaviors that stem from a godless heart. An irreverence towards God leads to an irreverent life in behavior before God. It's a sense of

breaking his ways, his stipulations, his laws, his standards. So irreverent hearts that live irreverent lives before God are invoking the present wrath of God. The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness, irreverent hearts, and irreverent behaviors in the world of people. Now you get to this 'who suppress the truth by their wickedness,' their unrighteousness. They're literally working to suppress what is true and what has been revealed in the world. And here we get the title of our message, suppressors of the truth.

Now, what does it mean to suppress something and to suppress the truth? I mean, this is talking about active effort that people are engaged in. They're working actively, working to deny, to keep hidden or pushed down that which corresponds with reality, what is really true. So people are bringing about this current wrath of God through irreverent behaviors, from an irreverent heart that has to work hard at pushing down reality all the time. I mean, when you literally think about it, it's exhausting.

I mean, people are exhausting themselves running from God and invoking his wrath. It's an enormous amount of work to do this, be a suppressor of the truth. And he says they're doing this very clearly from what has been revealed by God, just in creation itself, what has been plainly made known to them, and is clearly seen since the creation of the world. They have no excuse about. And here are the three things he says. Creation itself reveals God's invisible qualities. There is a demonstration of what God is like in creation. We can't see his qualities, but we know that he's a God of beauty. He's a God of majesty. He's a God of wonder. He's a God of order. He's a God of intelligence. He's a God of design. He is a God of loving, of life. He is creative of life. He is pro-life. This is a God who came that we might have life to the full. But you can see that in all of creation because it perfectly supports life. The whole thing is miraculous. And to think that a God did not create it takes active work to suppress that reality, that truth. So his invisible qualities are clearly known to anyone who's alive. And you, if you have to work to suppress that reality.

And then, of course, the power to create what is just the power we know of in creation. I don't know if you've ever been around a lightning strike near one or a massive wave. When it comes aboard. The whole of creation is filled with power, and God has said his eternal power is clearly seen in what has been created, not just his invisible qualities, but the power of God is there, and you have to work hard to deny that if you're going to suppress the truth, and in so doing, you're going to invoke this passive current wrath of God. And then, of course, he mentions the divine nature that this comes from the divine. And it's not just Paul who said this and revealed this to us. Peter said this, second Peter three, starting with verse three, he says, 'Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, where is this coming that God has promised? They will deliberately forget. See the conscious effort here? Deliberately forget that long ago, by God's Word the heavens came into being, and the earth was formed out of water, and by water, and by these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.' You see this in Genesis six. Just read about the flood.

And by the same word, the present heavens and earth are reserved. Now he's talking about the future wrath for fire being kept for the day of judgment and the destruction of the ungodly. And so I want you to let this settle in on you. This is why the gospel is so important and why we teach the whole counsel of God so people understand what's real. There's a current wrath being revealed. There's a future wrath being stored up against ungodliness, against unrighteousness, against wickedness by people who are denying what God has revealed to us, even just in creation, much less His word. And so Paul encouraged young Timothy in this as well. He said when he told him to preach the gospel, to keep preaching the word in season and out, he said, 'Here's what's going to happen. People will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around themselves a great number of teachers who simply will say what their itching ears want to hear. They'll turn away from that which is really true, the truth, and turn aside to myths.' And this, this suppressing is going on everywhere.

And I want to help you now. Here's my encouragement. First one for the day as you listen, this suppression is going on around the globe in almost every environment, in every culture in some way. And there are three consequences that come about when this is happening. And Paul mentions them here in Romans chapter one, and this is the passive wrath that's being revealed. You can see the consequences. What does God do when there is denial of him? And then there is movement away from him, and people then suppress the truth and live like none of this is true. God lets them go. He gives them over. He says, 'That's fine. You go your way.' Here's how Paul says it. 'Therefore, God gave them over to the sinful desires of their hearts, to sexual impurity, for the degrading of their bodies with one another.' I'm not going to read any more of that. I want you to go read it. He says it three times. That's verse 24 and 26. He says this because of this, 'God gave them over not only to the sinful desires of their hearts, but also over to shameful lusts,' shameful lusts. And then furthermore, he says one more time, 'because they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God. God a third time gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they would do what ought not to be done,' so that you can see the evidence of the active, passive wrath of God in our world today.

I want to encourage you to read for yourself Romans 1:18-32 and get familiar with it, and then look for the evidence of this in our world. And then I want to encourage you to become a searcher for divine truth. Just get after it. It's the truth that sets people free. And then, as Paul has done here, take part in the sharing of the good news of Jesus. This is a third aspect of God's wrath. He sent His Son so that if we put our belief and our trust in him, the wrath that is due us, that's being stored up for us in heaven, and the passive wrath that's being revealed in the

world could be poured out on his son for each one of us. And he is willing to do this today for anyone who will open their heart to the gift, the greatest gift ever given, the gift of God's one and only son. They'll open their heart to him. He himself will bear our sins in his body on that tree. It is by his stripes that we're healed, set free from the wrath of God. Oh friend, if you haven't opened your heart to him, why not today? Why not now? We should not be ashamed of the gospel of God. It is the good news for the salvation, saving us from God's wrath for all who believe. Father, thank you for giving us your word, which teaches us without error what to believe and how to live. And thank you for sending Your Son Jesus into the world. We praise you for it. Amen."