

# Alienation

by Charles Price

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**Scripture:** Romans 1:18, Romans 1:24, Romans 2:5, 1 Corinthians 5:5, 1 Corinthians 6:9, Galatians 6:1, Psalms 19:1, Luke 11:13, Proverbs 9:10, 1 Corinthians 3:10, 1 Corinthians 5:1, 1 Timothy 6:10

**Topics:** "Alienation", "Call to Repentance"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Well, to help us understand the depth of that theme of alienation, we're delighted this evening to welcome back Charles Price. Many of you will know that Charles has spoken here very frequently, not only in evening addresses, but also in Bible readings, and he's also well known at similar conventions throughout the UK and indeed around the world. Charles has also been a close friend and a colleague of ours on the Keswick Council.

He's also something of a historian in terms of all that's happened through this particular convention. You can still get the book which he's co-authored, Transforming Keswick. Up until recently, he's been the principal of Caponray, just down the road from here, but many of you will know that in a matter of, I think, just two or three days, he and the family leave for North America.

And having been such a great blessing to us, he's going to be a blessing in Toronto. And therefore, I'm going to embarrass him just for a moment by asking him just to join me ahead of time. We're going to read the scriptures and he'll preach after that, but just for a moment, we want especially to thank you, Charles, come up here.

And as I've said, we're enormously grateful for all that Charles has done for this event, not only in the ways I've mentioned, but in many other ways, in prayer and in support and in ministry together, in all kinds of ways, as has Hillary, his wife. And therefore, we want to give him just a very small memento, and we do so with ulterior motives, because we hope that once he hangs this in the wall of the manse, or whatever it is you're going to have at the People's Church in Toronto, Charles, this particular picture will remind you that we expect you back here in Keswick sometime. You're probably as curious as I am, so I'll open it.

Without tearing the paper, if I can, but I can't. I told him the longer he takes, the less time he has to preach. Well, I'm sure you'd like to see what it is, so I'll open it here, and my wife can repack it.

We leave the country on Thursday, and the packers at our house today, I taught somebody that, and they thought I meant Jim Packer, and they said, oh, it's Jim Packer over here. Isn't that beautiful, hey? A picture of dirt water, isn't it? Thank you very much indeed. If Charles is just here, we'll pray for him and the family, and also for his preaching of the word, and then I will read scripture, so let's pray together for the whole family.

Father, we thank you so much for the joys of being in your family, for the friendships which are created in our shared commitment to the gospel. We especially thank you for the way in which Charles and Hillary have been so committed to this event, and to all that it stands for in the ministry of your word, and the deepening of the spiritual life. We thank you for his contribution from this platform, but from many platforms throughout the UK and around the world, and we especially thank you for protecting him in his health, and giving him energy and strength to go on serving you.

And we'd especially like to pray for him and Hillary, and for Hannah and Laura and Matthew as they leave the country in a couple of days, and serve you in North America. We pray for a rich blessing on that ministry at the People's Church, and in Charles' continued ministry of writing, and proclaiming your word in other parts of the world. Please bless them.

Now this evening as we come to this passage of scripture, and our brother expounds it, we ask that you will open our hearts and minds to hear what you have to say to us. Sometimes we Christians are heavily influenced by the popular psychology of our own day, which talks about positive thinking and self-fulfillment. We know that in the past the preachers proclaimed sin in its awfulness, whereas when we talk about sin these days we tend to mumble.

And so we pray that as we look at this passage of your word with its authority and its clarity, you will empower our brother Charles, and help us as we come into your presence to realize the awfulness of this state of alienation as we turn our face too towards the solution which you have provided in Jesus Christ. Please grant grace to Charles and to us for these minutes which are ahead. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Now please do turn to Romans chapter 1, and then Charles, after I've read this, Charles will come straight to speak to us. Romans chapter 1, and we're going to read from verse 16.

Romans 1, verse 16. I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it was written, the righteous will live by faith.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God, nor gave thanks to him.

But their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man, and birds, and animals, and reptiles. Therefore, God gave them over, in the sinful desires of their hearts, to sexual impurity, for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the creator, who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.

Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the men also abandoned natural relations with women, and were inflamed for lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice.

They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful. They invent ways of doing evil. They disobey their parents.

They are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things, but also approve of those who practice them. Well, thank you, Jonathan, very much indeed.

And I wasn't going to say this. I was totally taken by surprise with that very kind picture there. But I will, in the light of that, just say how much I appreciate the number of you who have said to me, you're going to pray for us as we move on to a new phase in our lives.

We've been at Cape Mary Hall for about 25 years, and so we're leaving behind a place that has been a home to us, and where our friends are, but we believe very much that God has called us to this. And I won't go into those details, but if I am wrong, then I am totally confused about the guidance of God. But I believe very much that God has led us to this.

The People's Church is a church that I've known for a number of years. I've preached there on and off for the last 15 years. That was when I first went there.

And when they invited Hillary and myself and our family to move over there and join them, we believed, for reasons I won't go into, this was the will of God. So thank you for your interest. Many of you expressed in that.

It does mean I won't be here for the whole week. We actually leave the country on Thursday. I have four weeks of engagements in the United States on our way to Toronto, and the family will be with me for those in Wisconsin and California.

And then we arrive at the end of August. And on the 9th of September, I'm induced, I think is the word. Is that the right word? Inducted.

And then I start there. Well, tonight we're turning back to this passage Jonathan read to us a few moments ago. And our message this evening is a very solemn one, but a very, very necessary and important one.

As Peter indicated at the beginning, we have talked about the image of God and the purpose which He created humanity in the first case. Tonight we're going to talk about the devastation of sin and its consequences in our lives. And basically tonight, we're going to give the diagnosis of the problem.

And only as we understand this, I think, will we truly and adequately understand our world. But if you go home tonight depressed, though there will be a bit of light at the end of the tunnel, tomorrow night we're going to talk about redemption. What is the way back and the way out of this? Now the great danger when we begin to talk about sin and its consequences, and we look at these verses that we've had read to us, is that we may sit here in this tent and apply this word to that big dark world out there kind of mentality.

But I don't want to do that this evening. I want to talk about you and about me in the light of this. I heard of a couple on one occasion, and as they were growing older, the husband became convinced that his wife was losing her hearing.

This became a sort of sensitive subject between them. He would mention it once in a while, and she would resist any idea of this, and so he decided to keep quiet, but one day he did a little experiment. She was sitting in an easy chair in their lounge, and he was in the kitchen, and from the kitchen he said, Would you like a cup of tea, dear? And there was no reply, which is what he expected.

He went into the corridor, which linked the two rooms together, and he said again, Would you like a cup of tea, dear? And there was no reply. Again, he was not surprised by that. He went into the room without her seeing him, stood right behind her chair, and said, Would you like a cup of tea, dear? And she said, For the third time, yes! Now, who's got the problem? I know there's a problem out there, but if we were to sit around and talk about the wicked world tonight and simply gorge ourselves on some kind of reflected self-righteousness by doing so, we'd miss the whole point of this passage that Paul gives to us, because in chapter 2, verse 1, having talked about the things that we've read tonight, and we'll look at those in a moment, Paul says, You, therefore, have no excuse.

You who pass judgment on someone else, for whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same thing. So now that sounds a sweeping generalization. But Paul knew what he was talking about.

And the biggest problem is not the world out there. Actually, the biggest problem you and I face is the world in here. That's where sin corrupts and exists.

Now, we need to get an accurate diagnosis, because we'll never understand accurately the solution. We know superficially sometimes, well, Christ is the solution, but we don't really know what the problem is. And so our understanding of the solution is basically a superficial one, dealing with a few symptoms, cleansing our guilt, but that's about it.

Any good doctor will tell you that there's no adequate remedy without a proper diagnosis. And if you run these people into positive thinking, and you don't like to face the negative realities of life and yourself, and what the Bible talks about, you'll never get an adequate solution. If you want to visit your doctor, and you

go into his or her surgery, you go into this negative stuff, so you say to your doctor as he or she calls you into their room, Good morning, doctor.

I'd love a bottle of pink medicine, please. They'd say, I can't give you some pink medicine. What's wrong with you? And you think, here we go again.

This doctor is so negative. And you say, well, give me some of that strawberry-flavored stuff I've had the last time. I can't give you some strawberry-flavored stuff.

What is wrong with you? And then he begins to ask some very direct questions nobody else would dare ask you. How many times do you get up in the night? Fifty-four? What color is it anyway? Blue. And you say, now, tell me if this hurts, and he'll poke you where he thinks it will, and it does.

Ah, you say, yes, that hurts. It's good. What about this side? Ah, yes, that hurts too.

Now, why does he ask you embarrassing questions and poke you where it hurts? I'll tell you why. Because he's a good doctor, and that's why. And he says, I've got some good news and some bad news.

Here's the bad news. You are sick. You've got myxomatosis, but here's the good news.

Here's the good news. We've got a remedy. It's a bottle of pink medicine.

It has a few side effects. It makes you jumpy, but it'll fix the myxomatosis. You see, a good doctor wants to know the problem.

You know, the Bible takes time to explain the problem. You know the Book of Romans, many of you, and you'll know that the heavily marked chapters in your Bible probably, in the chapters you hear sermons on, are chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. Those are the good chapters. That's about faith, about justification, about union with Christ, about freedom from sin, about the Holy Spirit living and working with us.

Those are the great chapters. But you'll never actually understand those chapters adequately until you know chapters 1, 2, and 3, and you'll hardly ever hear sermons in those three chapters because they're about sin and corruption and judgment and wrath, a word we don't like very much. You see, if in verse 17 of chapter 1, Paul talks about in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, if the gospel is about restoring the righteousness of God into human experience, then that's the good news.

He then says in the next verse, the verse 18, the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. Now, he talks about the righteousness of God being revealed and also the wrath of God being revealed. We don't recognize either apart from the revelation of the word of God and the spirit of God.

But an understanding of both is necessary if we're going to understand the Christian life. You see, little unites us in our enthusiasm more than cataloging and condemning the sins of other people. It feeds our self-esteem that we can make other people look worse than we are.

But we're going to look at this, and my prayer is that the Holy Spirit will turn the searchlight into my heart and your heart as well. You see, the assumptions of these verses don't make for pleasant reading. In fact, it makes for offensive reading in our day when tolerance is a virtue and any sense of judgment is a vice.

You see, the popular view of the human race is that people are basically good, but some do evil and mess it up for the rest of us. That's the popular view of the human condition. It's actually the total reverse of what Jesus said, because Jesus in Luke 11 verse 13 said, if you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children.

Jesus' diagnosis is that mankind is basically evil, corrupt, but you can do good things. If your child asks you for bread, you don't give him a stone and watch him break his teeth and think it's funny. Of course you don't.

If your child, this is what Jesus said in those following verses, asks you for a fish, you don't give him a snake. You don't give your kids snake and chips for a joke. If you, though you are evil, of course you know how to do good things.

You do good things to your children. You do good things to your neighbor. But the basic diagnosis he gives is that you are evil.

Now, we can't accept this diagnosis of the human condition unless we know there is a solution to it, of course. That's why the world at large cannot accept this. We can face it only because Paul's purpose in explaining this in these verses in Romans 1 is to say, but there is a solution to this real problem that every human being has.

The problem of their sin. Now, if the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven, as he says there in verse 18, on what grounds is God's wrath being provoked? I mean, didn't God create us in the first place? Didn't He give us our limitations? Didn't He create the scenario where the fall took place in the first instance by giving the capacity to disobey? I'm not responsible. I was born in sin.

Doesn't the Bible teach me that? Then why is God's wrath provoked? Well, Paul says in verse 20, since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, His eternal powers, His divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. Now, says Paul here, human beings are without excuse because the issue is not ignorance, because he says God has revealed Himself. In this case, he says in creation.

The issue is actually disobedience to what God has revealed. Let me read you back in verse 19. Since what may be known about God is plain to them.

Because God has made it plain. We'll talk about that in just a moment. In verse 21, he says, for although they knew God, they did not glorify Him nor give thanks to Him.

In verse 25, he says there that they exchanged the truth of God for a lie. In verse 28, furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God. He gave them over to a depraved mind, etc.

Now, Paul makes these astounding statements. He says the problem with the human race is not that they do not know God. Ignorance is not the issue, he says.

The issue is that they have suppressed the truth that God has given them. They did not glorify God by responding and giving thanks to Him, he says in verse 21. They exchanged the truth for a lie and they did not retain the knowledge of God that He had already given to them.

If this is so, we ask ourselves, well, then how has God revealed Himself to humanity? Well, there are two ways he talks about. First of all, God has revealed Himself in creation, he says in this chapter, and He's revealed Himself in conscience, he says in the next chapter, chapter 2. Let me talk very quickly about this. God has revealed Himself in creation, he says in verse 20.

Because since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities have been clearly seen, being understood, sorry, His eternal power and divine nature, they've been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made so that man is without excuse. This is what theologians call natural revelation. That is, there is a revelation of God that is available to any man, woman, boy or girl who will open their eyes and actually believe what they see.

We may of course suppress this revelation, we may undermine it, we may try to explain it away, we may say it is naivety to believe in a creator because of the creation. But it's there. Psalm 19 says, The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of His hands, day after day they pour forth speech, night after night they display knowledge.

There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard, their voice goes out to all the ends of the earth, their word to the end of the world. And the psalmist says there, that God speaks in every language of the world by His fingerprints all over His creation. Now of course we've made that to be something naive to start thinking in those terms, unscientific, unsophisticated, simplistic.

But the fact remains, the creation reveals the creator. I have a map at home. It's actually packed now.

This map has four boxes. It's a map of the universe. And I love it.

I got it in a National Geographic magazine that somebody subscribed to me for a present once, for one year. But during that year this particular map came. It's got four boxes in this map of the universe.

The first box shows the Milky Way with the sun at the center and the planets that orbit our sun. And then from this box there is an arrow leading to the next box and the next box contains the Milky Way. Now simplistically the Milky Way is the shape of two dinner plates if you put them face to face with the bulge on opposite sides.

And there's a little arrow saying we are here, we're on the outer rim of the dinner plates. The third map, third box, and there's an arrow leading from that to the next box is a map of what they call our local galaxy. And by the way, our Milky Way is 100,000 light years across, contains 100 billion stars.

I counted them one day. The next box contains the local neighborhood, it describes it, our local neighborhood, with an arrow saying you are here and the Milky Way is a tiny little spiral in one corner of this box. 2.2 million light years away is our nearest neighbor, Andromeda, and then there are other neighbors.

And then from this box there's an arrow going to the fourth box and this box contains the known universe. There are 100 billion galaxies in the known universe. And I stand and look at that map from time to time and I get an incredible sense of smallness, which is good for us, but an incredible sense of the bigness of God.

Because you know something? He made all of that in one sentence on a Wednesday afternoon. On the fourth day, and he made the stars also. Bit of time left before tea, just make the stars also.

Incredible. And you look at the universe and you say God is big. I was sitting at my desk the other day, a little money spider ran across my desk.

Tiny little thing. I put my finger down on the desk in front of it. It saw my big finger land.

It stopped. It turned around, began to run back. I put this finger down the other side.

It saw it stop, turned back. I brought this finger closer until eventually this poor thing was between my two fingers and I picked it up and ran at my finger and I thought what an incredible little creature. Little hairy legs, little eyeballs, little heart that was probably beating very fast, little teeny weeny little brain, probably yards and yards of arteries and veins.

God created that little money spider. I remember thinking God is incredibly detailed. He's incredibly small.

And the vastness of our universe and the tininess of detail, every snow drop is different, tells us something about God. I once heard somebody say that when an artist paints a picture, he does two things. He copies something.

So you look at the picture, you recognize it's a landscape, it may be a portrait. Even if it's modern art, you say it looks like a sunset or an explosion in a paint factory or whatever it looks like. But you give it some interpretation.

It looks like something. An artist copies something. And the second thing an artist does is he expresses himself.

So if you look at Picasso, for instance, after a while you begin to say to yourself, oh, I think that's a woman. That's a leg coming out of the back of her head. And then you say to yourself, Picasso is strange.

Anybody who sees things differently to ourselves, we regard as strange. Because the picture tells them about Picasso. That's why, of course, the history of art is such a fascinating thing to look at because it tells you how people have been thinking.

But when God, as the supreme artist, created the universe, he did only one of those two things. He didn't copy anything because there's nothing to copy. All he did was express himself.

And the heavens declare the glory of God. Abraham Lincoln said, I never gaze at the stars without feeling that I'm looking into the face of God. I can see how it might be possible for a man to look down upon the earth and be an atheist, but I cannot conceive how he could look up into the sky and say, there is no God.

And the charge that Paul brings is not that these people didn't know anything about God, but they didn't respond to what they knew. They exchanged the truth that God had revealed to them for a lie. And then there is a revelation of God in conscience in chapter 2 and verse 15.

Let me read you this verse where he says there, that since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts. I should read verse 14 to get the whole sentence. When Gentiles who do not have the law do by nature things required by the law, they are law to themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

And Paul speaks there about the law written on people's hearts, this moral consciousness, this awareness that certain things are good and certain things are bad, certain things are right and certain things are wrong, that is deeply embedded in the human race. Why was there such a hue and cry the other week when the killers of Jamie Bolger were released? Because something deep in people's hearts said, this isn't justice, because something inside them says we need justice. Who put that into people's hearts? Why do the newspapers this past weekend seem to be so vindictive against Geoffrey Archer? Now that he's down let's put him out.

I'll tell you why, because there's something in their hearts that's indignant that this man should run roughshod over a woman that he's used and abused and call her a liar and use other people's own selfish ends because in the heart of the human race, every one of us, has this conscience and the fingerprints of God are all over, not just the universe, but over our lives. And above all, this is created in every human heart, this hunger to know God because there's a homesickness for God in the heart of normal people, every person. You can make an assumption about that.

God put eternity into the hearts of man. You can go to any city in the world at any time in its history, whether it's primitive or sophisticated, and you may or may not see great industry in every place. You may not see places of learning in every place.

You may not see the accumulation of wealth in every place, but you will see the evidence of worship in every place, whether it's the temple, or the mosque, or the shrine, or the idol, or the church. And if in our sophistication we've tried to grow beyond that, we'll replace them with sporting stars, and rock stars, and film stars, and all of us will want something out there bigger than we are. It will become for us a model and a mentor.

G.K. Chesterton famously said, when people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing. They believe in anything. And Paul's charge in Romans 1 here is that people have turned a blind eye to creation, and in chapter 2 they turn a deaf ear to conscience.

And as a consequence, he says, the wrath of God is being revealed. Now, in what way is the wrath of God being revealed? Well, there are two aspects to this. There is the immediate expression of God's wrath that Paul talks about in chapter 1, and then there is the ultimate expression of God's wrath he talks about in chapter 2. Let me read you what he says about the immediate expression of God's wrath.

In verse 24, therefore, he says, and the therefore follows what he has said about God's wrath being revealed, God gave them over in the simple desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, etc. Verse 26, because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Verse 28, he says there, he gave them over to a depraved mind.

What is the wrath of God on people for their sin? Is it that he zaps us or destroys us? No, it's more subtle, and I suggest more devastating than that and its consequences. The wrath of God is expressed, says Paul here, in God giving them over. Over to what? To the logical end of our own choices.

And here he specifies three expressions of the wrath of God in society. He talks in this passage, first of all, about sexual perversion. Verse 24 again, God gave them over in the simple desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

Now God gave them over, he says, speaking there of general sexual depravity. And then he specifies in verse 26 lesbianism. He speaks of women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.

And in verse 27, he specifies homosexuality in the same way men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Paul speaks there of homosexuality being a perversion, and he speaks of being indecent.

Now let's deal with the utmost compassion with those who are caught in this situation. It says in the book of Galatians chapter 6, if someone is overcome in a fault, restore him gently. I have great compassion for some I've been trying to help and work with who are caught in this situation.

But let's not pussyfoot around the actual issue itself. Because Paul says here that God hands them over to what he describes as a perversion. Now I want you to notice something important in this text.

There are two important exchanges that Paul talks about here. In verse 23, he says although, sorry, verse 23, they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal men. That's in verse 23.

In verse 25, he says they exchanged the truth of God for a lie. Notice that word exchanged. And then interestingly in verse 26, he says women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.

And in verse 27, men abandoned, same idea, exchanged natural relations with women for what he calls indecent acts with other men. Notice the relationship between the exchange of truth for a lie with the exchange of natural sexual relations for unnatural sexual relations. And I suggest to you these two aren't related.

That's why Paul, I think, speaks in that way in these verses. You see, if we were created to be in God's image, then we only know what a human being is designed to be like if we know what God is like. That's logical, isn't it? Made in his image, you want to know what we're supposed to be like? Find out what God is like.

Therefore, if we exchange the truth of God for a lie, we no longer know what humanity is supposed to be like and to act like. And therefore, we begin to act or it opens the door to acting inhumanely in all kinds of ways. Stuart Briscoe, who'll be here next week, commenting on this passage in the commentary he wrote on Romans, said confusion about deity leads to confusion about humanity.

Confusion about humanity leads to confusion about identity. Confusion about identity gives rise to confusion about sexuality. And that seems to be the logical sequence of thought in Paul's writing here.

In other words, get deity wrong and you'll get humanity wrong. Get humanity wrong and you'll get your identity wrong. You won't know who you are if you don't know what human beings were designed to be.

And you won't know what human beings were designed to be if you don't know what God is like. We're made in his image. And if you get your identity wrong, you may begin to get your sexuality wrong.

And Paul makes that direct linkage here. I don't want to be simplistic about a deep and a powerful issue. But this passage implies that sexual perversion, whether it's heterosexual or homosexual activity, has its origin in a failure to know how I am supposed to behave because I don't know what human beings are

designed to be because I don't know who God is because I've exchanged the revelation God has given and replaced it with a lie.

That tells me that sexual perversion is at its root a theological problem. Now, research into causes of homosexuality have indicated that one recurring factor are poor relationships with a same-sex parent. We're designed to know God as our Father.

You exchange that relationship with God and you begin to exchange, not understand your own sexuality as a linkage here. Now, Paul's point here is that the wrath of God is not that God will zap us for these things, but he will let us go. He'll hand us over.

These aren't the causes of God's wrath. They are the evidence of his wrath. He has given us over to these things.

Let me very quickly point out the other two. He talks about, if that's sexual perversion, he talks about material diversion. Material things are good, created for our benefit.

But in verse 25, their purpose is being diverted. They exchange the truth of God for a lie. They worship and serve created things rather than the Creator.

In other words, the things that God has created replace the Creator. That is what we call idolatry. He talks about images made to look like mortal men, birds, animals and reptiles because they've been caught up with material things instead of the Creator.

And when people's goals in life become the accumulation of things, when we measure our value by our possession of things, when we derive significance from created things, what Paul is saying here is that we are under the wrath of God by that very action. And then he talks about self-assertion. Sexual perversion, material diversion, self-assertion.

He speaks in verse 21 about although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools. This intellectual arrogance he speaks about where they claim to be wise, but they've become clever fools.

They've not become wise, he says. Their thinking has become futile because they detached themselves from God. You see, the fear of God, says the scriptures, is the beginning of wisdom.

And what is called wisdom by the world, they claim to be wise, he says, is foolishness because it's a wisdom that's detached from God. We live in a day, of course, when we've never had so much information available to us. We depend on information technology.

I carry my laptop wherever I go. I carry CDs. I have the whole Encyclopedia Britannica on CDs.

I have scores of commentaries stuck on CDs. I carry around. We can press buttons and access the internet and get all the information we want.

But I'll tell you this, there is no such thing as wisdom technology. Wisdom in the Bible has nothing to do with intelligence or information. Wisdom in the Bible has to do with a disposition towards God.

And we need to be very careful at worshipping at the shrine of human wisdom. Well, these are the three points that Paul picks out here. The wrath of God is being revealed, present, being revealed.

In what way? Because he's handing people over to sexual perversion. He's handing people over, he says, to material diversion, where they become preoccupied with the created things instead of the Creator. And he's handing them over to self-assertion, where they strut around in their sense of arrogance, not knowing, says Paul, that they're actually fools.

And he sums it up, verse 28, God gave them over to a depraved mind. And then he lists 22 things, which we won't read again, but Jonathan Redlum just now, that become the consequences of this. Without exaggeration, of course, we can look at these marks of the wrath of God when we're looking into a mirror of the 21st century.

This is our day. And the Romans to whom Paul wrote this saw the reality of this all around them, because in Rome, they were renowned for their perversions, for their materialism, for their depravity, and for their deluded sense of their own sophistication. But they did not know they were under the wrath of God.

You see, when you and I sin and disobey, God doesn't send thunderbolts to us. If he did, that would wake us up, maybe. Instead, he gives us over.

You see, you can choose to sin. You can be a believer here tonight, as most of us are, and you can choose to sin. What's God gonna do? I'll tell you what he'll do.

He'll let you go. If you engage in an illegitimate relationship, God won't strike you down, or cause your car to crash as you drive to the secret rendezvous. He'll let you go.

As Paul said to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 5, verse 5, about a man living in sexual immorality, hand this man over to Satan. That's the same ideas here in Romans 1. Hand him over. Exactly the same terminology.

God gave them over. But I'll tell you this. Your conscience will begin to be violated.

You see, the first time you disobey God, if you're a Christian, or you engage in some particular sin, you know it's sin, you'll probably lie awake at night, tossing and turning, full of fear, probably full of remorse. But I'll tell you this. Second time you do it, it'll be a little easier.

You won't stay awake quite as long. Third time, you won't stay awake as long as the second time. And the fourth time, you'll sleep as normal, and you'll begin to say to yourself, God doesn't seem to mind.

He's not doing anything about this. I've been involved, sadly, with one or two folks, Christian workers in this case, who have fallen sexually. I remember talking to one man, and he said, you know, the first time that I got involved in this sexual relationship with a woman, I thought God would never bless me again.

I thought as I drove home that day that some truck would cross the motorway, smash into my car, and I'd never get home. But it didn't. I got home.

I thought my wife would see it written across my forehead, but she didn't. He said, I went to preach the next week, and I thought, this is going to be like lead. But he said, God actually saved somebody.

He was an evangelist. I thought, God isn't as fussy about this as I thought he would be. And the second time, it became easier.

And the third time, it became even easier. Until for more than ten years, it became a lifestyle. And there may be some folks here this evening, and you do not know the damage you're doing to your own walk with God and your spiritual life and your spiritual well-being, because you've chosen to go in disobedience to God, and God will let you go if you insist.

And you might even begin to think you're getting away with this, but there's the ultimate expression of God's wrath in chapter 2, where in chapter 2 and verse 5, he says this. Let me read it to you. But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath when his righteous judgment will be revealed and God will give to each person according to what he has done.

There is coming a day, says Paul, when everything is going to come out of the closet. Every skeleton hidden away in the cupboard is going to come out. When the truth is going to be exposed and God's wrath, he says, that's being stored up will be expressed in eternal judgment.

Did you know there's a judgment seat for every Christian? Where those things that are of little value and no value, the wood, the hay, the stubble will be burned up. The things that are gold, silver, precious stones, it says, will survive. And the wood and hay and stubble are the surface things, of course.

The gold, the silver, the precious stones are those deep things within that aren't necessarily on the surface. But there's going to come a judgment day and Paul's warning is that sin provokes the wrath of God. That's why it is supremely a problem here.

You see, if you see sin primarily as your own problem, that is, it distorts my life, that's why it's a problem. It messes me up, that's why it's a problem. It makes me a slave, that's why it's a problem.

It leaves me with scars, that's why it's a problem. It does all of that. But the real reason sin is a problem is that it provokes the wrath of God.

If I understand sin as basically a problem to me to be resolved within myself, then I can try to overcome it. I can try to get counseling over some of my weaknesses and problems. I can try to resolve it.

But actually, none of that would touch the key issue. The key problem with sin is it provokes the wrath of God. That's why we'll talk tomorrow night and we'll hear tomorrow night about the cross of Christ.

Because Jesus Christ in the first instance did not die for you or me. In the first instance, Jesus died for his Father. He died to satisfy the just wrath of an angry God.

You see, we don't demand a cross to deal with sin. We'd be very happy for God to give a nod and a wink to him and say, I understand, I know you failed, that's okay. As long as you're genuinely sorry, I'll forgive you.

Wouldn't that be adequate for you and me? But it's not. Why is it not? Because the death of Christ was addressing the wrath of God. That's why later in Romans 3, he talks about the authorizer used the word to propitiate, that is to satisfy his anger.

This is extravagant, isn't it, by any human reckoning. If my son, I have a son who's ten years of age, if he does something wrong, I don't say, Matthew, this is wrong, you knew it was wrong and you did it anyway, one of us is going to have to die for this, either you or me. I would never say to my son, if I did, you'd say, that's an abuse.

But God did. Why? Because sin provokes his wrath. If you don't like the idea of an angry God, read Psalm 711 sometime, it tells us God is angry every day.

Not because this is some kink in his character, because he's a God of laugh. When you love someone, you're also angry at those things which destroy. And all the wrath of God was channeled to Christ, in order all the marvelous righteousness of God might be channeled to us.

But I speak to you tonight as I close, as a group of Christians here, you've known what it is to come to God, the vast majority of us, at some point in our lives, and say, Lord, I'm a sinner, would you please forgive me? But I tell you this, since that day, you came to Christ, the devil has been out to get you, of that you can be utterly sure. There's some folks here tonight, and you're caught up in sexual perversion. Let me tell you, that will shipwreck your faith.

You can violate your conscience, and it'll get easier. God will let you. He'll hand you over.

Somebody here, caught up in material diversion, materialism can shipwreck your faith. Paul said that, the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

But you men of God, flee all this. Somebody here caught up with self-assertion. Your own ego is what drives you.

Let me tell you, there'll be dozens of Christians in this tent tonight, and we're real Christians. The devil has found a foothold. And your conscience has become weakened.

And like the man in 1 Corinthians, it's serious stuff. Hand this man over to Satan. Let him go the road he's chosen.

It doesn't mean he's written off. That man said, it's said of that man, his spirit will be saved, but only by fire. And maybe some of us here tonight need to come back to Jesus again.

We need our consciences to be re-sensitized. You may have been a Christian for many years, and there may have been times you walked much more closely to the Lord Jesus than you know you're walking today, because somewhere along the line, there's sin that's never been dealt with, and God will hand you over to it. You can come to Jesus tonight, because you see, whether you're a Christian or whether you've never become a Christian, there's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin.

There's a door that is open that you may go in. The Calvary's cross is where you begin. And you come as a sinner to Jesus.

You can come as a sinner to Jesus right now. We'll find a solution in the next few days, of course. But don't wait until then, if God has spoken to you.

At the end of this meeting, just behind where I'm standing, you go out through the exits here, turn left or right, and there's the Pastoral Center. Nobody there needs to know your history. But you may need to go

and pray with somebody and say, Sure, I've been a Christian, but I know I've wandered away, and I know that what's happening in my life, God has given me over, and things have become distant from God now.

You can come back tonight. You can come home tonight. Let's pray together.

O Jesus, we stand as men and women who know something of the corruption of our hearts, the lure and the pull of sin. But Lord, we're scared that you'll hand us over, but you've told us that you will. But thank you so much.

You don't need to, because there's a way home. And I pray that in this tent here tonight, there'll be many, many folks who'll find their way home, who'll come in true repentance, true cleansing, who'll know the true replacement of all their corruption with the pure Holy Spirit as he fills their lives, re-sensitize their conscience, make them men and women of God again. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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