

## ***BEAUTY & BLEMISH, ROMANS 1:18-2:29***

Pax Romana #2

◆**Intro:** Many of us have perhaps experienced the loss of a pet. It can be very traumatic. Your cute hamster dies. You cry. Your furry gerbil gets lost. You cry. Your arrogant cat doesn't come home. You're... fine with that. We had a little hamster grave yard in our house in Highland for Russian-dwarf hamsters only live an average of two years. But what's even harder is when, for example, something goes wrong in the family dog. Heretofore he has been gentle, and playful, and man's best friend. He is indeed a beloved part of the family. But then, for some unknown reason he turns aggressive. Lets say that Fido starts attacking every dog that dares place one tender paw on his yard. Lets say that our once dear pet chases a couple of the neighbor kids. They barely escape. The family struggles to combat the aggression for a while, keeping him on a leash, or in the house, or penned up. Hollering at him when he misbehaves, or if they're PC dog owners, "reasoning" with the animal and explaining your emotional stress, and promising positive reinforcement if only he will decide to be more kind. But then comes the point where the dog is dangerous and, perhaps even to the toddlers of the home and... he bites someone. That's when Dad says something like "Times up. I can't risk the well-being of my household. We will have to say Good-bye to Fido." Awe dad, don't you love Fido? Of course he does, but there is something now in their pet that does not fit the home. So they give Fido away. (tearfully)

## **BEAUTY & BLEMISH, ROMANS 1:18-2:29**

Pax Romana #2

◆ This is something like what Paul is describing in our text for today. The world God made is like the family home. The dog is like you and I, his creatures and a loved part of the family. The aggression is like our sin, something gone wrong in an otherwise wonderful being. And God punishing evil, that is, putting it down for good, is like Dad deciding that Fido cannot continue in his home. If he is going to insist on being that way, ok, but not here. Not in the presence of Dad. In the Bible God's putting away, his punishing of sin is called his "wrath" and God's wrath against wickedness is the topic of our text.

◆ **1. God's wrath is his allowing sinners to walk the sin road we've chosen.** It is his allowing us to have the life and consequences we choose apart from him. God's judgement on godlessness is eventually to give us what we want. (Hell is the same thing: a place of godlessness, where all God, and all good and all beauty are absent, just as those have rejected God wanted. When you reject God, eventually you also lose all the beauty that accompanies him.) So it is true to say, for the unbeliever, the beauty of earth is as close to heaven and they will ever be. And for the believer, the blemish of earth is a far from heaven as they will ever be.

◆ A. Recall that last time we looked at the "gospel" message: that a "righteousness from God" that was "revealed" (v17). The "for" in verse 18 connects us back to that. And now there is a second thing being "revealed": wrath of God. Paul is showing us

## **BEAUTY & BLEMISH, ROMANS 1:18-2:29**

Pax Romana #2

why the gift of righteousness through Jesus is so wonderful.

And there's more to it than we typically think.

◆ God's wrath is actually part of his love for what is good and holy, like the father's love for protecting his children from an aggressive dog. Or anger that your child is playing in the street. It's actually love for the child and concern for her safety.

◆ God's wrath is not only something coming, it is present in this world. Verse 18: It is revealed (present tense). Now it is true that a judgement is coming. Paul will refer directly to that in chapter 2. But it is also true that there is the wrath of God in this world all around us. We live in a world under wrath. Without repentance it will not improve, no matter how much we tout "education", or "equality" or better laws.

◆ *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." John 3:16-18, NIV.*

◆ *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." John 3:36, NIV.*

◆ Wrath is our present state, where God allows us the garbage we choose! God's wrath is his giving us over to the

## **BEAUTY & BLEMISH, ROMANS 1:18-2:29**

Pax Romana #2

depravity we want. [You will notice a 3-fold mention that God “gave them over” in verses 24, 26, 28.] Martin Luther observed that to be under God’s wrath is to have God withdraw his *saving* hand from us. It is a most severe punishment for a sinner to be given over to what seems good to him. In this world we know great beauty and we know great blemish. There is the goodness and the greatness of God evidenced all around us. That any know it at all is his saving hand. And there is also the gore of sin evidenced all around us too. What we see in that is his hand of wrath.

◆**2. God’s wrath (allowance of our sin) explains the presence of foolishness and folly.** In other words, look around. Do you see foolishness? Do you see distortion/folly of good things? It’s all part of the consequence of sin. Lets start with foolishness.

◆A. The consequence of God’s wrath, his giving us over to the sin we choose, is that we become blind to the truth all around us.

◆“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” Romans 1:21, 22, NIV.

◆**Truth #1)** Paul points out (19) that the existence of God is plainly present. Creation points to the reality of God. To

## **BEAUTY & BLEMISH, ROMANS 1:18-2:29**

Pax Romana #2

beauty. To design. To divinity. Psalm 19 says the same thing.

◆*"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 into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." Psalms 19:1-4, NIV.*

◆But apart from God we can't see it! I want to show you what I mean. I have an educational video on how snowflakes are formed. What I want you to look for is the teacher's presuppositions about reality. Take a look:

◆**(show video).**

◆What I find amazing in that video was the two utterly opposite views of snowflakes. Bentley called them "master pieces of design". The kid in the video responded "of course we know there is no design in a snowflake." A bit later he will say, that it's all random. Paul, I think, would call that "suppression of the truth" that God allows when you and I continue to reject him. Everyone one knows intuitively that there is a God, or why do we look for one, dream of one, or make movies about saviors, and super-people. The Bible says,

◆*"He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end." Ecclesiastes 3:11, NIV.*

## **BEAUTY & BLEMISH, ROMANS 1:18–2:29**

Pax Romana #2

◆ Martin Luther put it like this:

◆“All men therefore, in particular all idolators, had a clear knowledge of God, especially of his Godhead, and his omnipotence. They proved this by calling the idols which they made “gods” and even “God”, and they revered them as eternal and almighty, at least as strong enough to help them. This demonstrates that there was in their hearts a knowledge of a divine sovereign Being.” Commentary on Romans, p.43

◆**Truth #2)** In addition to creation, there is another thing all around us that points to God: morality. Where does that come from? Greg Bahnsen, In his book *Presuppositional Apologetics* gives a marvelous illustration.

◆“Imagine a person who comes in here tonight and argues ‘no air exists’ but continues to breathe air while he argues. Now intellectually, atheists continue to breath –they continue to use reason and draw scientific conclusions [which assumes an orderly universe] (*mine: creation points to God*), to make moral judgments [which assumes absolute values] (*mine: morality points to God.*)– but the atheistic view of things would in theory make such ‘breathing’ impossible. They are breathing God’s air (*mine: reason, science, order, moral judgments*) all the time they are arguing against him.”

◆The consequence of God’s wrath, his giving us over to the sin we choose, is that we become blind to the truth all around us.

## **BEAUTY & BLEMISH, ROMANS 1:18-2:29**

Pax Romana #2

◆B. The second consequence of God's wrath, giving us over to the sin we want, is the distortion of good. It's a dark picture of humanity taken in vs24-32. It's as if Paul is saying, "You want to know why a "righteousness from God" is such life-saving news? Look at how screwed up the world is. There is not a prayer of mankind fixing it up. Things are backwards and upside down. This is the presence of God's wrath, giving people over, not stopping them from their willing ruining of themselves. We turn so many things upside down.

◆1) He starts with explicit idolatry. (23 *"[they] exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal men! and birds, animals, reptiles."*) People for thousands of years have taken their innate knowledge of God and eternity, and foolishly declared that wooden images of some animal is that power. It's senseless. It's also world-wide. It's a flip-flop of reality. The immortal is exchanged for the mortal. It's not even reasonable!

◆2) Then Paul moves on the the human level and it's most basic components: gender and sexuality. Know how you can tell the world is blemished? People have flip-flopped the created order of relationships. "Shameful lusts" refers to all sexual sin; everything outside a loving married relationship. To further emphasize the distortion of sexuality he address homosexuality as a specific flip-flop of God's order. Bulls don't mate with bulls. Men can't mate with men and

## **BEAUTY & BLEMISH, ROMANS 1:18-2:29**

Pax Romana #2

produce a child. All across nature we find the male mating with the female. Their very physical structure designed for this to work. But people have exchanged the Creator's pattern for sexuality for their own wants.

◆3) Paul thirdly (v28 "gave them over") points to the other flip-flopping going on in the world of men, namely various sins which always boils down to the same thing as idolatry: exchanging the truth of God for a lie.

◆*"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming."*  
*Colossians 3:5, 6, NIV.*

◆Look at verse 29 and the list of sins that flip-flop the truth. In fact, all sin is a perversion of reality. Greed is a perversion. Its a flip-flop of truth. You might think that homosexual practice is a clear depravity. But do you think that disobeying your parents is a clear depravity? (v30) Gossip is a flip-flop of truth. Slandering someone's name; this is a flip-flop (a perversion) of God's created order. Everywhere we look things are distorted, flipped. In fact we are so distorted on this planet that we end up applauding the sin when we see it instead of disliking it! (v32) Talk about a flip-flop! We say, "Good for you for being true to yourself." No! Not good for you. And not good for all the rest of us. Be true to the truth!



## ***BEAUTY & BLEMISH, ROMANS 1:18-2:29***

Pax Romana #2

◆ [Before we go on I'd like us to think about the heavily charged topic of homosexuality for a moment. A lot of people read this text and see Paul coming down on homosexuality. Understand this: while the Bible is clear that homosexual practice is a perversion, as we have just seen, it's clear that a lot of things you and I do are also, in fact, actual perversions of beauty, blemishes in the world. What does this have to say to us?

◆ Well, from this we learn, for example, that refusing to be friends with or to welcome people struggling with homosexuality is not the mark of a strong Christian faith, or of conservative purity. Do you do the same for every other kind of sinner, including yourself? Do you refuse to welcome your sister who easily lies? Do you refuse to befriend your neighbor because he has a hot-temper? Also it's worth asking, "Do I ever encourage my children to make idols of exam results? How might I nod sympathetically at someone's envy? Have I allowed gossip to go on around me unchallenged? You can't single out one struggling kind of person and say you have integrity.

◆ On the flip side, welcoming homosexual practice as relevant in our enlightened culture, and denying that it is sin -is neither a mark of love, integrity, or christianity. It is not loving to not live by the truth. But, the sin someone is struggling with is no reason for a follower of Jesus NOT to love them. After all, is that not what God does for us because of Christ?]

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## **BEAUTY & BLEMISH, ROMANS 1:18-2:29**

Pax Romana #2

◆ **Conclusion:** (Sum points 1-2)

◆ This text is a dark picture of reality in the fallen world where we live. But friends, with Jesus in your life, it needn't be that way. Don't settle for it. Sandi and I were reading in a devotional by John Eldredge which said the following:

◆ *"Something awful has happened, something terrible. Something worse, even, than the fall of man. For in that greatest of all tragedies, we merely lost Paradise -and with it, everything that made life worth living. What has happened since is unthinkable: we've gotten used to it. We're broken in to the idea that this is the way things are... We deaden our sorrows with cynicism as well, sporting a bumper sticker that says, "Life sucks and then you die." Then we try to get on with life. We feed the cat, pay the bills, watch the news, and head off to bed, so we can do it all again tomorrow. Standing in front of the fridge, I'm struck by what I've just watched. Famine in Africa. Genocide...where? Someplace I can't even pronounce. Corruption in Washington. Life as usual. It always ends with the anchor folding his notes and saying, "Good night." Good night? That's it? You have nothing else to say? You've just regaled us with the horrors of the world we live in and all you can say is "Good night"?"*

◆ Well our Christian faith has something more to say. There is a world under wrath revealed to us, but there is a righteous not ours also revealed to us. I like how Tim Keller put it.

## ***BEAUTY & BLEMISH, ROMANS 1:18-2:29***

Pax Romana #2

◆“In the beauty of the world we are to see God’s existence. In the brokenness of the world, we are to see God’s justice. As we do, we are to run back to the place where we see God’s mercy: the cross.”

◆Listen friends, If you have believed on Jesus, you do not have to fear God’s wrath. He has given you righteousness by your faith. You are therefore safe. Safe enough to be humble and ask “What idols are fighting for a place in MY heart? What do my habits, and sins reveal about what I am worshiping as a false-master? What would it look like if I depended on my Creator in this area?”