

GENERAL EDITORS

NATHAN BUSENITZ
JOHN MACARTHUR

RIGHT
THINKING FOR
A CULTURE IN
CHAOS

RESPONDING BIBLICALLY
TO TODAY'S
MOST URGENT NEEDS

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*To the precious people of Grace Community Church:
May the truth of God's Word guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
so that you walk in the light as He Himself is in the light.*

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*Do not be conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,
so that you may prove what the will of God is,
that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

ROMANS 12:2

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION

How should we then live?

Francis Schaeffer, the renowned evangelical apologist, asked that question a half-century ago, and it became the title of a video series Schaeffer produced in the late 1970s. In that series, he documented the development and decline of Western civilization, focusing on culture's downward trajectory from the Enlightenment through modern times.

Schaeffer's central question was both timely and timeless. All followers of Jesus Christ must ask themselves how they ought to live as they seek to glorify God and walk in His ways. The apostle Peter posed a similar question in 2 Peter 3:11, when he asked his readers, "What sort of people ought you to be?" Peter made that inquiry at a time when the church was being persecuted. His words strike a chord with us today because we find ourselves in an increasingly hostile society. Our culture has grown more and more antagonistic toward biblical norms and Christian values. So, as the world around us gets worse, how are we to think, speak, and act?

Our culture's decline has been rapid. Within the past few decades, we have witnessed an unprecedented spiral of moral degradation. Today's leading influencers openly reject the notion of moral absolutes, choosing instead to exchange the truth of God for whatever seems

right in their own eyes. As a result, God has given our society over to degrading passions characterized by immorality, self-centeredness, and pride. We find ourselves as Christians trying to avoid the corruption as we navigate the complexities of a culture in chaos. Peter's description of Lot in 2 Peter 2:7–8 summarizes our experience. While living in Sodom, Lot was “oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds).”

This brings us back to Schaeffer's pivotal question. In a society that celebrates sin and scorns biblical truth, *how should we then live?* If we hope to exhibit right thinking and right living, we must begin by looking to the Word of God. His Word lights our way in the darkness (Psalm 119:105) and enables us to stay firmly grounded through uncertain times (Psalm 1:1–3). Scripture reveals the good news of the gospel (James 1:21). It is the means the Spirit uses to grow us in holiness (1 Peter 2:1–3). And it is the weapon God has given us to fend off temptation and error (Ephesians 6:17). By focusing our hearts and minds on divine revelation, we anchor ourselves in the truth (John 17:17). So, if we are going to think and act rightly, we must align our lives with the unchanging standard of God's Word.

On the pages that follow, we will evaluate contemporary trends and cultural issues through the lens of Scripture. These topics include secularism, relativism, environmentalism, critical race theory, transgenderism, homosexuality, education, epistemology, social media, dating and marriage, government overreach, technology and worship, spiritual apostasy, and our Christian witness before a watching world. As you read each chapter, our prayer is that you will be equipped to think biblically about each subject.

Our culture may be in chaos, but the clarity of God's Word cuts through the confusion. It establishes our convictions, ignites our

courage, and governs our conduct. It shows us how we should live. Only by renewing our minds with divine truth can we protect our hearts from the contamination around us (Psalm 119:9–11). Consider Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." May that be your desire as you seek to think and act in ways that honor the Lord.



PART 1

**CULTURE'S
FUNDAMENTAL
PROBLEM**

CHAPTER 1

DEPRAVITY'S DEAD END

Society's Downward Spiral

JOHN MACARTHUR

It is one of the most tragic and memorable scenes in the Bible. The strongest man who ever lived awoke to discover his superhuman might had vanished. Judges 16 records the disturbing demise of Samson at the hands of Delilah:

She made him sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him. She said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And he awoke from his sleep and said, “I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him. Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison (verses 19–21).

Much could be said about Samson’s arrogance, immorality, and folly. The mighty judge of Israel—who carried off city gates and killed

lions with his bare hands—was vanquished by his own lusts. But the most devastating detail in that account is not Samson's sudden weakness, subsequent blindness, or grueling servitude. It is found in the words of verse 20: "He did not know that the LORD had departed from him."

To be abandoned by God is a dreadful consequence. Earlier in Judges, the Israelites experienced a similar judgment from God. In Judges 10:13–14, the Lord said to the people of Israel, "You have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will no longer deliver you. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress." Years later, King Saul was forced to face a similar reality. God had abandoned him. As Samuel explained to Saul, "Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king" (1 Samuel 15:23).

In Proverbs 1:24–31, divine wisdom is personified, offering this sober warning to the one who refuses to listen:

Because I called and you refused,
I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention;
and you neglected all my counsel
and did not want my reproof;
I will also laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when your dread comes,
when your dread comes like a storm
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish come upon you.
Then they will call on me, but I will not answer;
they will seek me diligently but they will not find me,
because they hated knowledge
and did not choose the fear of the LORD.
They would not accept my counsel,
they spurned all my reproof.

So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way
and be satiated with their own devices.

Those who spurn divine wisdom will be abandoned by God. When that point comes, it will be too late. They will face the repercussions of their foolish choices.

This is not only true for individuals, but also nations. Old Testament Israel, for example, was abandoned by God on account of unrepentant idolatry. Consider the haunting words of Hosea 4:17, referring to Israel by the name Ephraim: “Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone.” After the people abandoned God, He abandoned them. Jesus reiterated this truth in His confrontations with the Pharisees (see Matthew 21:43). Because God had rejected Israel’s religious leaders, Jesus instructed His disciples to pay them no mind: “Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind” (Matthew 15:14). God had abandoned the leadership of the nation; and when God lets you go, it is serious.

It is one thing to observe this sobering reality in Scripture, it is another to evaluate contemporary culture in light of it. Many concerned citizens in the United States find themselves hoping God does not abandon our nation. They reminisce about the Christian principles on which our government was founded and talk about a time in history when American society celebrated biblical morality. But what they fail to realize is this: God has already abandoned America. If we are one nation under God, it is only in the sense that we are under His judgment.

WHEN GOD ABANDONS A CULTURE

The United States is not the first nation to be abandoned by God. If the Lord tarries, it will not be the last. This is the cycle of history—a pattern Paul described in Romans 1:18–32. In that passage, we find the most graphic and comprehensive presentation of what it looks

like when God abandons a society. A comparison of Paul's alarming description with our contemporary culture shows them to be an exact match.

Romans 1:18 begins with familiar words: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven." The emphasis throughout this section is on the wrath of God. But what did Paul mean when he spoke about God's wrath in this text? Scripture identifies at least five categories of divine wrath. First, there is eternal wrath—the judgment God unleashes on the unbelieving dead in hell. Eternal wrath involves everlasting suffering and punishment. Second, the Bible speaks of eschatological wrath, which is poured out on the wicked at the end of the age. This punishment is reserved for the tribulation, described in detail in Revelation 6–16. A third category might be called calamitous wrath. Throughout history, God has unleashed calamity in the world to punish the wicked. The most vivid example of this is the global flood described in Genesis 6–9. Fourth, there is consequential wrath, experienced by individual sinners when they reap the consequences of the wickedness and folly they have sown (Galatians 6:7–8).

A fifth category of divine wrath is also described in Scripture—the wrath of abandonment. This is a form of God's judgment in which He lets go of a society and allows it to destroy itself as it catapults without restraint in the direction of its own sinful devices. It is this kind of wrath Paul described in Romans 1:18–32; and it is this kind of wrath that is already at work in our culture.

THE CHARACTER OF A COLLAPSING CULTURE

In Romans 1:18, Paul explained that God's wrath is revealed against ungodliness and unrighteousness. A few verses later, starting in verse 24, he detailed the characteristics of a society that has been abandoned by God. The passage reads:

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them (verses 24–32).

Notably, the Greek verb *paradidomai* (meaning “gave them over”) occurs three times in this passage (verses 24, 26, 28). The term carries a judicial sense, used in Greek literature to describe law courts and criminal proceedings. It describes the handing over of a prisoner for punishment.

In Romans 1, this verb expresses the reality that God has delivered a society over to sentencing and judgment. Corruption in any culture can only be tolerated for so long. There comes a time when God has

had enough. He lets go and turns the people in that society over to the sentence they have passed upon themselves. The wrath of God is manifested in the removal of restraining grace, so that a corrupt culture continues headlong into moral degradation and ruin.

The three uses of the verb “gave them over” mark three stages in this downward progression. Culture’s collapse begins with a tolerance for sexual immorality (verse 24), followed by the celebration of homosexual sin (verse 26), concluding with the complete loss of both mental and moral sense (verse 26).

Sexual Promiscuity

Verse 24 explains that “God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.” The word “impurity” speaks generally of sexual sin and moral corruption. The first step toward cultural demise is a sexual revolution. Moral perversion, pornographic desire, and sensual behavior define the culture. When a society fosters illicit passions and encourages immoral lifestyles, it has been abandoned by God.

In the United States, this shift took place during the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Instead of condemning immorality, society began to tolerate and even promote promiscuity, fornication, adultery, and every form of sexual sin. As a result, these manifestations of the unredeemed heart (Mark 7:20–22) crept out of the shadows and into the spotlight. When sexual sin is normalized by the culture, you can be sure God has abandoned that society.

Homosexual Perversion

The second step in this progression is articulated in verses 26–27. Paul wrote,

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions;
for their women exchanged the natural function for that

which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

By celebrating homosexuality and lesbianism—in the name of pride, no less—our culture gives clear evidence it has been abandoned by God.

When a culture is collapsing, what begins as a sexual revolution is followed by a homosexual revolution. Same-sex desires and homosexual relationships become normalized within society. Even though God built natural consequences into such behavior, including venereal disease, those enslaved by such sins continue to engage in them. This is the second step of a culture's demise.

Skewed Perspectives

The third and final step in society's downward spiral is described in verse 28, which notes that God "gave them over" to a depraved mind. When this occurs, the reasoning faculties fail to function properly, resulting in cultural perspectives and social norms that are utterly corrupt. Rather than operating in a reasonable way, people act irrationally in pursuit of every form of unrighteousness. Their actions make no logical or moral sense because they are governed by lust and greed. Paul's list of vices in verses 29–31 is long, providing a comprehensive description of the wickedness that characterizes a culture abandoned by God.

Not only do inhabitants of such a society lose their ability to reason, their consciences are also corrupted. The conscience is a mechanism given by God to warn a person of wrongdoing. In the same way that the nervous system signals pain to warn of physical harm, the conscience sounds the alarm when moral or spiritual danger is perceived. But the conscience is only as good as a person's moral code. It functions

properly when informed accurately. But in a morally corrupt culture, the conscience goes awry because the standard is askew. As a result, the people not only participate in wickedness, they also give hearty approval to others who do the same.

No indicator of God's abandonment is more certain than when society attacks those who confront sin. That is the case in our culture today. Our society will not tolerate someone who takes a stand against sin. When Christians advocate for biblical morality—confronting things like pornography, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and abortion as sinful—how do people in the world respond? Their antagonism, hostility, and intolerance is evidence that our culture is under God's wrath.

THE REASON FOR RUIN

As explained above, verses 24–32 outline the stages of deterioration in a collapsing culture. Paul's description is both detailed and devastating. But we might wonder: Why does this happen? What puts a society on the path to divine judgment and cultural collapse? The answer to those questions is found in the previous section, Romans 1:18–23.

Suppressing Truth

Verse 18 explains that those under God's wrath “suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” This is where the end always begins, with a willful repudiation of divine truth. From the beginning, Satan focused his efforts on distorting and undermining the Word of God (see Genesis 3:4–5). When our culture removed the Bible from its place of supreme authority, replacing it with worldly philosophies and the wisdom of men, the demise of our society became inevitable. The unbelieving world hates the Word of God. In the name of progress, skeptics and critics have denied the Bible's veracity, inspiration, sufficiency, clarity, and authority. But the consequence for such thinking is not upward

progress. The suppression of divine truth always accelerates the downward decline of a culture headed for ruin.

As Christians, we recognize God's Word is absolutely true (John 17:17), and we submit to its authority because it comes from Him (John 8:31; 10:27). It was the truth of the Word, the message of the gospel, that God used to save us (Romans 10:10–14; James 1:21). This same truth sanctifies our hearts, through the power of the Spirit, as we grow in grace (1 Peter 2:1–3). And it is this truth that equips our hearts as we endure trials and stand firm against temptation (Ephesians 6:10–17). God's absolute truth is the only hope for our sinking society. Our commission, as followers of Christ, is to proclaim that truth to those around us (Matthew 28:18–20), shining as lights in the darkness (Matthew 5:14–16).

In suppressing the truth, the architects of cultural collapse reject all that God has revealed about Himself. That revelation includes what He has made known about Himself in the created universe. As the next two verses (Romans 1:19–20) explain, “That which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.” All people witness the handiwork of God when they look at the world around them. They cannot deny the existence, beauty, structure, and order of natural laws and processes. By considering creation, it is clear that there is a Creator, Sustainer, and Designer of both the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). In addition, all people witness the reality of basic moral laws because of the conscience within them (Romans 2:14). They understand fundamental concepts of right and wrong, love and indignation, morality and injustice. These bear witness to the divine Lawgiver and Judge, the Holy One who holds men and women accountable for how they live.

They can determine these cause-and-effect relationships because

God endowed them with reason. But when they suppress the truth, they reject what is clearly revealed through creation and the conscience. Instead of using their reason to honor God, they use it to rationalize their sin and explain away their wicked actions. Having deliberately closed their eyes to the truth that is evident all around them, they are without excuse.

Cultivating Folly

When a culture repudiates divine revelation, rejecting the Creator and Judge of the universe, the people in that society exchange the truth for lies. They exchange wisdom for folly. As verses 21–22 explain, “Even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.” People who reject God say wrong is right, and down is up. They propose the preposterous. In the name of science (meaning “knowledge”), they make nonsensical claims: that everything came from nothing, that life came from non-life, and that irreducibly complex creatures evolved from single-celled organisms. All of this is pure folly. But the unbeliever necessarily prefers any worldview that avoids accountability to the Creator.

They refuse to honor God, being ungrateful to Him for all He has given. Having rejected Him, they become empty in their speculations and ideologies. Their foolish hearts are darkened so that they mix ignorance with arrogance and profess to be wise (verse 22). In truth, they are out of touch with reality. They have rejected reality by rejecting God. Ironically, they mock the true wisdom of God as foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18).

The height of their folly is seen in their false worship. They replace the true worship of God with shameful substitutes. Verse 23 makes this clear: “They exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed

animals and crawling creatures.” They exchange the worship of the Creator for the worship of the creation. From the pagan cultures of the ancient world to the modern environmentalist movement, unredeemed humanity has been following this pattern since the Fall.

False religion replaces the true God for a false deity made in the image of the creature—whether in the form of a physical idol or an invisible figment of man’s imagination. Some sociologists might celebrate religious pluralism, asserting that religion represents cultural expression at its highest point. But unless it is the true worship of God, it is the very opposite. False religion is mankind at his worst. It is humanity at its lowest and most debased.

SOCIETY’S ONLY HOPE

When we look at our culture, all the elements found in Romans 1:18–32 can be easily identified. Our society is not *about* to experience God’s wrath, it is *already* experiencing it. The evidence of His abandonment is all around us. People’s hearts are broken, their minds are depraved, their folly is blatant. They claim intelligence but cannot even define truth. For that matter, they cannot tell the difference between something as basic as a man and a woman. They feign religion and posit enlightenment. But they do not know God. They have rejected Him; and He has abandoned them. Technologically, our society may be at its highest point. But in categories that matter eternally, it is at its lowest. Our culture’s mantra is like that described in Judges 21:25: Everyone does what is right in his own eyes. They walk in rebellion against the truth of God and His Word.

So how should we, as followers of the Lord Jesus, pray for our society? Psalm 81 provides a helpful template to consider. Though it was written with Old Testament Israel in view, the principles found in this psalm have application for us today. In verses 11–12, the Lord Himself is speaking: “My people did not listen to My voice, and Israel did not

obey Me. So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in their own devices.” Because of Israel’s unrepentant disobedience, God abandoned the nation. That indictment foreshadows Paul’s words in Romans 1. God abandons the nation or society that rejects Him and His Word.

But the psalm continues, in verse 13, to express the heart of our gracious God: “Oh that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways!” This is what we ought to pray for—that the Word of God would be proclaimed so that many would repent from sin and turn to walk in the ways of the Lord. This is not a time for cowardly preachers to deliver weak sermons. This is a time to ask God to raise up a generation of courageous, faithful preachers of the Word, who will declare the gospel with boldness and grace.

If our nation were to repent, like Israel or any other nation, God would respond (see Jonah 3:6–10). Though we are not Israel, the character of God showcased in Psalm 81 has not changed. Notice the Lord’s response to the possibility of the people’s repentance: “I would quickly subdue their enemies and turn My hand against their adversaries. . . I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you” (verses 14, 16). God wants one response from any nation or society: for its inhabitants to humble themselves, be contrite, and tremble at His Word (Isaiah 66:2). The only remedy is the gospel. It is the message that humbles the sinner by calling him to turn in contrition from his wickedness and embrace the Lord Jesus in saving faith.

Pray for this generation, that God will call, shape, and send many workers into the harvest. Pray for pastors everywhere. Pray for Christians to be bold, and for boldness yourself. There is only one solution: the truth by which God saves and sanctifies. If the people in our culture will respond and listen to His truth, God will open the floodgates of mercy and grace. Pray that the Word, as Paul said, would have free

course and would run with all its power across this land. Pray that people would hear and believe and walk in obedient faith. Pray this all for the glory of God.

I do not know what God's plan is for our nation. But I see His heart expressed in Psalm 81. "O...if you would listen to Me!" (verse 8). That is what God is looking to see. Only then will He turn away His wrath from a nation or people who are under His judgment.