

EXPOSITION OF ROMANS
"The Results of Rejecting God"
Romans 1:24-32

Mililani Community Church
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Paul stated the great theme of Romans in 1:16-17: READ. The theme of Romans is the righteousness that God provides for believers in Christ. In this first major section of Romans (1:18-3:20) Paul is showing us how desperately we need God's righteousness. All of us, regardless of race, nationality, personal distinctions or religious heritage, are under God's judgement and stand guilty and without excuse before the Judge of the universe. The scene is a court room. Paul is God's attorney. The first person Paul brings before God is the Gentile man, the pagan man--the man without the knowledge of the Bible. He does not have a knowledge of the Bible, but he has a knowledge of the truth about God from his conscience and from the created universe. He is without excuse before God, because he suppresses the truth he has and goes on living a godless and wicked life. Our culture today reflects a society largely made up of people without knowledge of the Bible. This generation has been called the post-Christian age. So these verses are very important in understanding what is happening in our Western culture today, as we come under the wrath of God.

This passage can be divided into FOUR parts (we looked at the first three parts last week): 1. Revelation of God's Wrath (18); 2. Revelation of the knowledge of God (19-20); 3. Rejection of the Knowledge of God (21-23); 4. Results of Rejecting the Knowledge of God (24-32).

Revelation of God's Wrath (18). We saw last week that God is not only a God of righteousness, He is a God of wrath. God's wrath, is God's holy, righteous hostility toward all that is evil. His wrath is revealed against all the godlessness and wickedness of men. Godlessness refers to man's attitude of irreverence and disrespect for God; and wickedness refers to the injury and hurt done to other human beings because of a disrespect for God's laws.

Revelation of the knowledge of God (19-20). God's wrath is revealed FIRST, because men possess the knowledge of God but they reject that knowledge and try to suppress it. READ vv. 19-20. They know that God exists and that He is all-powerful, but they suppress this truth. The word "suppress" literally means "hold down." As a result they are without excuse. They are justly under the wrath of God.

Rejection of the Knowledge of God (21-23). In vv. 21-23 the SECOND REASON men are justly under the wrath of God is that they not only SUPPRESS the truth, they PERVERT the truth. READ vv. 21-23. They possess a knowledge of God--that He is and that He is all-powerful, but they will not acknowledge God as Lord and live in grateful obedience to Him.

In these verses, Paul shows that mankind follows a process in rejecting the knowledge of God: First he ignores God. He does not glorify him or give thanks to him. Second, he engages in worthless speculation about God. Third, the idea of God as revealed in nature and conscience disappears from his mind and his whole inner being (heart) is darkened and incapable of discerning truth. Fourth, he becomes proud and thinks he is wise and sophisticated--when he is actually a fool. Finally, he exchanges the glory and majesty of the immortal God, for something shaped like the image of a man or a bird or an animal or reptile. Man has to have something to worship. But since he has turned away from the worship of the true God, he exchanges "the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles."

It is important to understand that what Paul is saying here is just the opposite of what the world believes. The world tries to teach us that the path of the human race has been upward from its original animal beginnings. That we went from animism (worship of spirits in rocks and trees) to polytheism (the worship of a pantheon of gods and goddesses), and finally to monotheism (the worship of one God). But that's not the way it happened. Robert Brow published a book entitled Religion: Origins and Ideas, in which he argues correctly that the popular theory of evolutionary religious development does not fit the facts. He shows that the work of anthropologists indicates that the original form of religion was monotheism and that the polytheistic or animistic religions we see today among certain so called "primitive" people are actually a degeneration from a true knowledge of God. That is exactly what Paul is saying here. Men, in rebellion and rejection of God have perverted the idea of God into something other than what He really is.

TRANSTION: Beginning in verse 24, Paul shows that turning away from God launches a man or a culture or a nation upon a downward path that leads to utter moral depravity of body and mind. . .Idolatry leads to immorality and perversion. Here we see the specifics of what God has actually done to unleash his wrath upon humanity. Three times we are told that God has abandoned man to perversion. The sentence says "God gave them over"--It is found in verses 24, 26, 28.

Ever since Adam's first rebellion in the Garden of Eden, man has wanted to get rid of God, to push him out of his life. "God, I just want you to leave me alone! Get off my back and just let me get on with my life as I want to live it." Finally God says OK! And He does.

William Hendriksen has written: "At the proper time, known only to God, impenitent sinners are by God's wrath allowed to be swept away by their own sins into the pit of their vile passions." God judicially abandons man to his own moral perversion.

Let's observe that downward spiral man takes when he turns his back against God. . .This is the experience of all who run from God.

RESULTS OF REJECTING THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD (1:24-32)

The first stage is in verses 24-25.

Given over by God to sexual impurity (24-25).

When people turn from God to worship and serve "created things rather than the Creator" the LORD judicially abandons them. He gives them over "in the sinful desires of their hearts to to impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another."

Sex is a wonderful gift. A gift imparted to the human race by God. It is a gift to be enjoyed. BUT it is to be enjoyed within the bonds of marriage. Not outside of marriage. All sexual activities apart from sex in marriage are condemned by God. Such things as adultery, prostitution, or living with your boyfriend or girlfriend are forbidden by God. Romans 1:32 says, those who do such things deserve death." Physical intimacy between one man and one woman in marriage is the only sexual relationship that has the approval of God (Gen.2 :24).

Its obvious that hardly anything in Romans 1 is more relevant to our culture that what Paul says in these verses. Today, our nation is plunging into sexual impurity of mind and body at a rate that boggles the mind. The latest issue (February 10) of U.S. News and World Report has a cover story about pornography in America. This article points out that the sex industry in the United States has gone from a minor subculture on the fringes of society into a major component of American popular culture. Twenty-five years ago a federal study estimated that the total retail value of all hard-core pornography in the United States was between 5-10 million dollars. Last year Americans spent eight billion dollars on hard-core pornography.

Not too long ago CBS ran an hour long special on the freewheeling lifestyle in California. They interviewed many women who had been caught up in it. Interestingly the nearly universal opinion of these women was that they had been betrayed by the sexual revolution. As one woman said, "All men want from us is our bodies; we have had enough of that to last a lifetime." These women were expressing precisely what Paul says in verse 25 when he says "they exchanged the truth of God for a lie." The sexual revolution and the new hedonism in America is a deception. It is a lie. It leads only to becoming dirty, degraded and betrayed as a human being.

There is a second downhill step man takes when he turns his back on God Given Over By God To Homosexuality (26-27)

I said that there is nothing more contemporary in terms of today's culture than Paul's description of a declining society in Romans chapter 1. This is clear from America's headlong rush into moral impurity. But the decline becomes even more apparent as Paul begins to talk about sexual perversion, namely lesbianism and male homosexuality. There was a time when these practices were considered so reprehensible that a moral person not only did not speak about them, he or she did not even know what homosexual behavior involved. Today these practices are written about in explicit detail in virtually every major newspaper and magazine in our country. Grade-school children discuss them.

Throughout history, one of the marks of a society in decline has been an increased tolerance of and participation in homosexual activity. It has always been a strong indicator that the foundational unity of a culture--the family--was breaking down. Carl Wilson substantiates this in his book, *Our Dance Has Turned to Death*.

The word "natural" which Paul uses in verse 27 is an important word. Also the word "unnatural" in verse 26. Because these words explain why this second stage is a further step long the downward moral path.

Fornication and adultery which are mentioned in verse 24 are not "unnatural" sins, because they are not against nature. They are sins, because they break the moral law of God. They result in impurity and the degrading of our bodies. But they are not unnatural. They are accomplished by using the body in a natural way. But that is not true of homosexuality. Homosexuality is "unnatural," and it is accomplished by using one's body in an unnatural way, that is, against nature. Any person with common sense can look at the way his body is designed and be convinced that homosexual practices are not normal.

Perhaps this is why Paul speaks of a specific judgement of God upon the sin of homosexuality: "Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion." Up to this point Paul has been saying that God punishes you by letting you do what you want. But not here--at least not only that. Here Paul speaks of a particular penalty. "received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion."

Is Paul here speaking of AIDS? No, not specifically, because he had never heard of AIDS. But what he is saying is that sin does and will have consequences, and unnatural sins will have particularly unnatural consequences. Time magazine, a few years ago ran a cover story on AIDS, called "The Big chill: Fear of AIDS. In the article they called AIDS "a vague sort of retribution, an Old Testament-style revenge." The article quoted novelist Erica Jong, author of *Fear of Flying* and a former high priestess of sexual abandon, as saying, "It's hard enough to find attractive single men without having to quiz them on their history of bisexuality and drug use, demand blood test results and thrust condoms into their hands. Wouldn't it be easier to give up sex altogether and join some religious order?" The article also quoted an entertainment writer who said: "AIDS pushes monogamy right back up there on the priority list."

This is God's universe, and it is a moral universe. The only wise thing to do is to come to terms with it, repent of sin, and come back to God in the way he has provided: through faith in the sacrifice of His Son. Not to do so is to self-destruct.

There are two major things the Bible says about homosexuality:

- Homosexuality is a sin, not a sickness or an innate, sexual orientation. People are born not as homosexuals but as heterosexuals. The "natural" biological function of a man or woman is to have sexual relations with someone of the opposite sex, not with a member of the same sex. Neither is homosexuality an illness that requires treatment. If it were a physical disease, then it is the only sickness in Scripture that God says is worthy of everlasting damnation (Romans 1:32)! The biblical view of homosexuality is that it is a sin. And like any other sin, it's committed freely by people who are in rebellion against God.
- Since homosexuality is a sin, it can be forgiven and overcome. Some people seem to think that because practicing homosexuals could receive the death penalty under the Mosaic Law (Lev. 20:13) they are beyond God's forgiveness. This is simply not so, as Scripture reveals: "Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." I Cor. 6:9-11.

Notice that some of the people referred to here were homosexuals before coming to Christ but now they are not? God can and will forgive the sin of homosexuality and help a person to overcome it. But first, an individual must acknowledge that his or her homosexuality is wrong, and then confess it to God (I John 1:7-9).

**There is one more step downward when men reject the knowledge of God. . .
Given Over By God To A Depraved Mind (28-32)**

When people persist in casting God out of their lives, He finally turns them over to an outcast mind. READ vv. 28-32: "to do what ought not to be done. . . ."

What does Paul mean by a depraved mind? He talked earlier about foolish thinking and darkened hearts. But this is a mind that is totally depraved--not just sinful. Not merely foolish or in error. It is a mind so depraved that it begins to think that what is bad is actually good and that what is good is actually bad. A depraved mind is so far gone on this downhill path of judicial abandonment that the people involved actually come to approve and applaud what is evil (READ 1:32).

In the last verses of Romans 1, Paul gives us a long list containing 21 items of things which illustrate a depraved mind. James Boice calls these verses, "lifting the lid on hell." These verse give the details of what theologians call "total depravity." A depraved mind has a total disregard for others. It destroys and fragments everything it touches.

Let's look briefly at Paul's list of the sins that mark a civilization nearing collapse:

- Wickedness. describes people who take delight in doing what is wrong. It is the same word used in verse 18. Literally it means "not righteous, or "unjust." What is right is determined by the character or the law of God. They delight in doing just the opposite.
- Evil. This is a term which means a general inclination to do evil and take pleasure in vicious actions.
- Greed. This is the "passion for more and more and more possessions." The lust to advance yourself even at the expense of others.
- Depravity. The word refers to the deliberate wickedness that delights in doing other people harm. It could be translated "maliciousness."

These first four seem to go together to describe injustices that people commit against the property and the well-being of others. The next five detail sins against the very persons of other human beings.

- Envy. Envy is related to greed, but it goes beyond it, because it shows that the chief factor in our greed is jealousy over the fact that other people have more. They may even have less than we do but we are still greedy for what they have. In Ancient Greece there was a man whose name was Aristides. He was a great man and was called "Aristides the Just." But he was put on trial for something as many men were. A citizen of Athens came to him not knowing who he was and asked him to vote for his own banishment. Aristides asked, "But what harm has Aristides done to you?"

The man said, "None. I am just tired of hearing him called "Aristides the Just." That is envy in its most destructive form!

- Murder. Envy often leads to murder. Cain murdered Abel because he envied him. It was envy that caused the brothers of Joseph to plan his death.
- Strife. The word refers to a quarrelsome disposition and its consequences.
- Deceit. Refers to outright treachery by which words are used to ensnare the unwary for the deceiver's personal gain.
- Malice. The malicious person is one who is against other people and is out to harm them.

Next comes. . .

- Gossip. It refers to slanderous gossip that is often spread in secret and that is harmful to another person's reputation.
- Slanderers. Slanderers carry gossip one step further. Gossip is unleashed in secret, but slander is done openly. Greek word literally means, "to speak against someone or "defame" him.
- God-haters. Not many people would admit that they hate God. But allow something to come into their lives that they consider unfair, and their hatred of God immediately boils over.
- Insolent. They treat others with contempt, as if they alone amounted to anything, and all others amounted to nothing.
- Arrogant. Describes someone who is "puffed up with a high opinion of himself" and who regards others with contempt.
- Boastful. Constantly bragging about themselves.
- They invent ways of doing evil. They take special delight in coming up with "original" and creative methods of destroying others.
- They disobey their parents.
- They are senseless. This person may be very intelligent, but in the area of moral values they are stupid. Literally means "without understanding."
- Faithless. This has to do with breaking an appointment or a covenant. It means that what they solemnly commit themselves to cannot be trusted.

- Heartless. This literally means "without natural affection." It can be seen in a mother who aborts her child, or a father who abandons his family.
- Ruthless. The word means "without mercy." These people are cruel and show no mercy to others.

Add these words all up and you have a little foretaste of hell. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, "Hell is a condition in which life is lived away from God and all the restraints of God's holiness." The basic point is that the human race has chosen to go its way without God and as a result of this choice God has abandoned the race to the result of its own choices.

Dr. John Gerstner, a Professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary was teaching about the depravity of man, and to make his point he compared men and women to rats. After he finished his address there was a question and answer period, and someone who had been offended by the comparison asked Gerstner to apologize. Gerstner did. He said, "I do apologize. I apologize profusely. The comparison was terribly unfair. . . .to the rats!" He then went on to show that what a rat does, it does by the gifts of God that make it rat-like. It does not sin. But we, when we behave like rats, behave worse than we should and even worse than rats. We are worse than "beasts" in our behavior.

Someone asked a question recently in one of our Bible studies in Romans, "Why does God give a civilization over to this kind of thing? I like the answer that Ray Stedman gave to that question: "He does it because it is only when darkness prevails, and despair and violence are widespread, that men are ready to welcome the light." Remember Isaiah's prediction: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (Isaiah 9:2).

In the first century mankind was sunk in the darkness of despair. Idolatry had penetrated the whole world. Men had turned from the true God. In that hour, in the darkness of the night, over the skies of Bethlehem the angels broke into song. "unto you is born this day, a savior which is Christ the Lord."

Stedman says, It is against the growing darkness of our own time that we need to make this message as clear as we possibly can--by our testimony, by our lives, by the joy and peace of our heart. God has found a way to break through human weakness, arrogance, despair, and sinfulness to give us peace, joy, and gladness once again."

Just as Jesus was born in Bethlehem so long ago, so he can be born in your heart now. That is the good news of the gospel. In the decaying world in which we live we can see the glory of this truth as it delivers people from their sins, "You shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." Matt. 1:21.