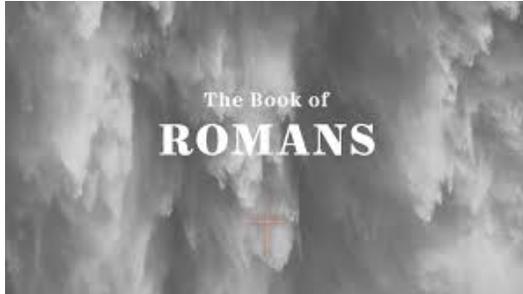


How The Fall Affects Us All

Romans 1:24-32

Romans #4

Weekend of February 22-23, 2020



Introduction

In Romans 1 Paul is showing us that every person (Jew, Gentile, religious, irreligious) has the same problem: we have all turned away from the knowledge of God that was made known to us in creation and in our consciences.

God has sufficiently revealed himself, Paul says, both TO US (from the Creation) and IN US (through our consciences) for us to respond with humility and awe--but we didn't want to know

the truth about a glorious, ruling, holy God (and that's because we wanted to be the glorious, all-wise, all-ruling ones). So, we suppressed the truth.

When it comes to the knowledge of God, we all know, but sometimes we don't know because we don't want to know.

Because we decided that we made a better God than God did, God allowed us to assume that role in our lives. In the last part of Chapter 1, you find there being for lack of a better phrase, "tit for tat..."

"(they) exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things." Romans 1:23 "For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions." Romans 1:26

"...they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him..." Romans 1:21 "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves..." Romans 1:24

"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God... God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done." Romans 1:28

Bible Study

Paul now begins to explain how this has played out in our lives and in human history...

"For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error." Romans 1:26-27

This is the longest and clearest passage in the Bible on homosexuality. And let me just say, I know that historically we in the church haven't done a great job talking about this, and an ever worse job caring for those going through this--but let's just look humbly and open-mindedly at what Paul says here first and then we'll talk about what it means for people following Jesus.

In one sense, we shouldn't be surprised this is where Paul turns first. He's not picking on homosexuality. If God made us in his image, male and female... then it shouldn't surprise us that the effects of our rejection of us show up in those primary relationships.

"Paul cites homosexuality not because it is a greater sin than any other, but because it is the clearest evidence of a rejection of God's order in creation."

In recent years, some have tried to say this passage refers only to certain kinds of promiscuous homosexual acts—prostitution, or one-night stands, or masters forcing slaves to have sex with them, and that kind of stuff, and that Paul was simply unfamiliar with the committed, loving homosexual unions we see today and if he had he would have made the distinction.

But that's not true: Enduring, committed, same-sex relationships were most certainly a "thing" in the Roman world and Paul most definitely knew about them. Both Plutarch and Plato wrote about long-term, committed homosexual relationships. **As a well travelled Roman citizen, Paul would have know these things.**

Yet, Paul doesn't distinguish between kinds of homosexual acts, and identifies all sexual relations of men between men and women between women as a departure from the Creator's design for human flourishing. **They are unnatural, he says. Literally in Greek, "against nature."**

Again, it's important to realize that Paul is not just randomly picking on homosexuality here, he is citing it as one of the clearest examples of elevating our desires over the Creator's design in which we say, "It's not about what the Creator wants; it's about what I want."

What we are seeing here is a desire to elevate ourselves over God's desires for us in a multitude of ways. Look at how he makes his argument in these verses...

"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless." Romans 1:28-31

As you read this list, Paul is saying that our idolatry, our elevation of our desires over God's will has affected every part of our lives. Look at the various ways according to this passage our lives have been disordered...

- **Sexual disorder**
- **Economic disorder**
- **Social disorder**
- **Spiritual disorder**
- **Family disorder**

Our rejection of God has corrupted every part of our lives. He starts with homosexuality but goes on to show how every part of our life is affected by the disorder that comes from sin.

The chief sin--the really wicked one--is rejecting God as the center and ruler of our life. That's the sin that brought on all the corruption, and it's one we've all participated in alike equally.

In some people, corruption manifests itself in envy, pride, unbridled personal ambitions, an out-of-control temper; maybe an inability to control your impulses for food; a propensity toward doubt, worry or depression. In others, it manifests itself in some form of corrupted sexual desire-which is something every human being struggles with at some level.

The central sin is the same: we rejected God's rule and substituted our own. That manifests in different people differently and we don't always get to choose our corruption.

Let me say something that I fear might get misunderstood: In that sense, you can think of homosexuality as an affliction and not just a sinful choice. For most gay people, they feel they didn't choose those desires.

Here's what I've learned: almost every person I've encountered (in the church, at least) who struggles with a same-sex attraction is almost always dealing first and foremost with an unanswered prayer: **"God, why won't you take away these desires?"**

That means people with same sex attractions really ought to be first and foremost recipients of our compassion. This doesn't make same-sex behavior any less sinful, any more than it makes outbursts of temper or envy or materialism less sinful.

There are three ways we can really go wrong with his issue in the church...

Believing God Doesn't Care About This Issue: He does. He's crystal clear in this passage, as well as 5 other passages in the Old and New Testament. Look at what he says here...

"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

Someone says, "But I was born this way." I don't dispute that. And some of us were born with a propensity toward selfish ambition or a raging temper. The Bible's message is we all need to be born again.

You get that possessing a desire innately doesn't make it right, right? Anger or ambition or certain sexual desires are not right simply because they come from deep within me.

Possessing a desire innately just shows us that we have corrupt hearts and we need to be born again. You can't reform your way into heaven; you have to be born from above. The gospel message is not "let the gay become straight" but "let the dead become alive." Here is a second idea...

Thinking That Homosexuality Is The Worst Sin: Paul lists homosexuality as simply one corruption among many. Do you think of deceit and boasting as equally 'depraved'? How about greed? What about being disobedient to parents? In another one of his letters, Paul even

talks about the pride that comes from religion and an obsession to be better than others as an example of this idolatry (Gal 4:8–9). Is that equally depraved in your book? It should be.

I mean, in terms of frequency of mention and the passion with which he mentions it, it would appear that quite a few other sins are more egregious in God's eyes than homosexuality. In fact, we see Jesus demonstrating great sympathy for those in sexual sin and great animosity toward the religiously proud.

Jesus never said it was hard for the same-sex attracted to go to heaven; he did say it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a religiously proud or materially wealthy person to get there. This is not to say it's not sinful--just to say we often present it differently than the Bible does.

Listen: We only grasp the gospel when we understand, as Paul did, that we are the worst sinner we know (1 Tim 1:15)—and that if Jesus came to die for us, there is no one that he would not die for.

When you realize that, you'll cease being a Pharisaic teacher of the law and you'll become a gospel witness. You'll start loving your neighbor as someone made in the image of God and feeling compassion for them in their weakness. And you'll treat them first and foremost like people who deserve compassion, not scorn or judgment or a political voting bloc to be marginalized.

They are not "them," they are "we." You should see in the face of every sinner a reflection of the corruption that afflicts your own heart; the fruit of the rebellion you have participated in. Is that how you read Romans 1? Here is the third way we go wrong...

Assuming It Is Hard For LGBT People To Get To Heaven: Let me say something very clearly: Homosexuality does not send you to hell. And here's how I know that: Being heterosexual doesn't send you to heaven.

What sends you to hell is refusing to allow Jesus to be the Lord and center of your life, regardless of how that manifests--it might manifest itself in your refusal to let Jesus be Lord over your sexual life; or in your refusal to obey him with your money; or your right to control your career.

And that means that repentance for the gay or lesbian person looks fundamentally the same as it does for the straight or religious person. "God, I'm sorry for elevating my desires over your will. I'm sorry for attempting to define my identity apart from your design for me. I'm sorry for taking on myself the authority to declare what's good. I'm sorry for seeking satisfaction in self-fulfillment rather than from giving glory to you. I recognize Jesus is Lord and turn over control to him." We all come to Jesus in the same way.

Bottom line here: Paul's approach to homosexuality is neither what we'd call liberal nor classically conservative in our culture. He doesn't deny its sinfulness like a liberal nor does he elevate it as the chief of all sins like a conservative. He lists it as one of many examples of the corruptions that came from a society that has rejected God and replaced ourselves and our desires in the center where he belongs, a rebellion in which we have all alike participated equally.

Application

Paul is heading toward this conclusion in chapter 3, I'll go ahead and give it to you...

**“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”
“Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” Romans 3:10-15, 23**

We all stand under judgment. Not just certain kinds of sinners--all kinds. And the only hope for any of us is the blood of Jesus.

The greatest truth of Romans: The righteousness of God revealed in the gospel is not a standard by which he judges sinners, but a gift of righteousness by which justifies them. He is not just a righteous God angered by our sin, but a merciful Father who wants to save us from it, who was willing even to interject himself into our place and suffer his wrath for us so that we could be spared.

It matters not what kind of sinner you are, but what kind of Savior he is.