

Homosexuality

Romans 1:26-27

26 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.

27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

Preachers can face two different temptations when it comes to preaching a passage like this. On the one extreme, some preachers are issue-oriented and they will pull out a soapbox and stand up and rant and rave against moral sins in America almost every week. There may be some who think that is what I should do. But God had called me to preach His word, not my pet peeves.

The other temptation, on the other extreme, is to almost skip over texts like this by barely mentioning them as we pass by. I have prayed that I would not succumb to either of those temptations. For those of you who have been around for a while, you know I love to preach the Bible verse by verse. This is one of the reasons I do it, because in God's timing and in God's plan, we come naturally to this passage of scripture. I'm not picking on anyone; I'm just following the Word of God.

My prayer for us as a church, and for me as the preacher, is that we will find a Biblical balance between clear conviction about the sinfulness of homosexual behavior, on the one hand, and patient compassion for those of you who may have same-sex attractions, or have friends and relatives who have homosexual desires on the other hand. I have no desire to drive homosexual people away from God. My wish is that all people would come by faith to Jesus Christ who alone can transform us by His Holy Spirit into His likeness.

Let me remind you of the context in which these two verses are found here in Romans 1. Paul is eager to preach the Gospel at Rome because as he said in verses 16-17, **"it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith."**

So in the following section Paul presents the reason why people need salvation and the Gospel that has the power to save. The principle is stated in verse 18: God's wrath is presently being revealed against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. All mankind is guilty before God and deserving of His wrath, because men are suppressing God's truth by their own sin.

In verses 19-23 Paul shows that although God has revealed His greatness and glory to mankind, people did not glorify Him as God or give Him thanks. Man was made in God's image, to reflect His glory. Instead, man bows down to his own glory, and then to the creatures over whom he was commanded to rule. The order God established at creation has been turned upside-down by man's sin.

Sin has many faces, and thus God's wrath takes various forms. In Romans 1:24-32, Paul describes three manifestations of God's present wrath, which are the result of man rejection of the truth of God. Three times Paul says that God as a manifestation of His present wrath has "given men over," to go further into their own sin. God let men go into the consequences of their own sin. All three judgments share three things in common.

First, each group has received some revelation about God. Second, each group has rejected that revelation, exchanging it for some perversion of that revelation. Finally, each group is given over to some form of sin, which the sinner desires and deserves, as a manifestation of God's wrath.

We saw last time that the first manifestation of God's present wrath is described in verses 24 and 25. Men have rejected the truth of God and exchanged it for a lie. They have chosen to worship the creature, rather than the Creator (verse 25). Because of their rejection of God's revelation of Himself, God "gave them over" to their own natural, fleshly lusts. The result of this judgment is that men, by sinning in this way, dishonor their own bodies. What happens when men refuse to honor God? God gives men over to their own lusts so that they dishonor themselves. When men honor themselves, by exchanging the glory of an "incorruptible God" for their own corruptible image and likeness, God gives them over to impurity, so that their image is dishonored. How men treat God, in God's justice, becomes the standard for the way in which God allows men to treat themselves.

Second in verses 26-27 because man rejects the revelation of God in nature, God gives them over to vile passions. When man's worship of God is perverted to the worship of nature, rather than of the God who created all, is it any wonder that God would choose to turn men over to sin in such a way as to let men act in an unnatural way? So verses 26 and 27, both women and men are given over to unnatural, homosexual desires. The resulting defilement is represented by Paul as a divine judgment: **"receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due."**

Third in verses 28-32 when men rejected the truth of God, He gave them over to a debased mind leading to the practice of those things which are not fitting, not proper. If men will not act properly toward God, based upon His self-revelation, then God will give men over so that they will act improperly toward one another. Men now, by their conduct, not only defile and dishonor themselves, they are a plague to society. The outcome is a long list of sinful attitudes, dispositions, and practices, all of which are destructive. Finally men end up in verse 32 not only doing these sinful things, but approving of those who practiced them. Men have lost their sense of what is right and wrong.

Paul did not write verses 26 and 27 to simply denounce homosexuality or to point to it as if it were a worse sin than any others. He wrote this section to demonstrate that all people are under the wrath of God, are deserving of death, and they need a Savior.

If Paul's objective is to show that all people are sinners, why does he focus on homosexual relations here?

Thomas Schreiner in his commentary on Romans (Romans [Baker], p. 94) explains it like this,

Probably because it functions as the best illustration of that which is unnatural in the sexual sphere. Idolatry is "unnatural" in the sense that it is contrary to God's intention for human beings. To worship corruptible animals and human beings instead of the incorruptible God is to turn the created order upside down. In the sexual sphere the mirror image of this "unnatural" choice of idolatry is homosexuality.

Paul uses unusual Greek words for "male" and "female" here, which are elsewhere used in the creation account. His point is that homosexuality for either sex goes against

God's intention in creation. The sexual disordering of our lives, most vividly seen in homosexuality (though not only there), is the judgment of God upon the human race because we have exchanged the glory of God for other things.

The deepest problem of our lives, whether heterosexual or homosexual, is the terrible exchange of the glory of God for images (verse 23); the exchange of the truth of God for a lie (verse 25); the disapproval of having God in our knowledge (verse 28). Failed worship is our worst disorder. This is beneath all the problems of the world. Repairing this is what Jesus came to do and is the Gospel that His church is called to proclaim.

The sexual disordering of our lives, most vividly seen in homosexuality (though not only there), is the judgment of God upon the human race because we have exchanged the glory of God for other things. The reason Paul focuses on homosexuality in these verses is because it is a vivid dramatization in life of the profoundest connection between the disordering of heart-worship and the disordering of our sexual lives.

From the beginning, male and female were made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Manhood and womanhood were to display God's relation to His people and Christ's relation to his bride, the church (Eph. 5:31-32). Sexual union in the covenant of marriage represents pure, undefiled, intense heart-worship. That is, God means for the beauty of worship to be dramatized in the right ordering of our sexual lives.

But instead, we have exchanged the glory of God for images, especially of ourselves. Therefore God decrees that this disordering of our relation to Him be displayed in the disordering of our sexual relations with each other.

Homosexuality is an obvious form of that breakdown. When man turns from God to images of himself, God hands us over to what we have chosen and dramatizes it by male and female turning to images of themselves for sexual union. Homosexuality is the judgment of God dramatizing the exchange of the glory of God for images of ourselves.

So with that in mind, let's briefly examine verses 26-27. I will not have time today to cover this subject as thoroughly as the Bible does in other places, so I would encourage you, if you have more questions about it, please come and talk with me and we can look at what the Bible says in more detail. Today I will make a few simple points:

1. Homosexual behavior is sin.

We live in a time when homosexuality is not only practiced, but even celebrated. Some people have even tried to defend the legitimacy of homosexual behavior from the Bible. Most common, for example, is the claim that the denunciations of homosexuality in the Bible are not references to committed, long-term homosexual relations, which these people say are legitimate, but rather refer to promiscuous homosexual relations and to pederasty, which are not legitimate.

Those who would dare to say that it is sin are labeled as intolerant bigots. But God's Word is not tolerant of homosexuality or ambiguous about it: it is clearly sin. Whenever homosexuality is presented in the Old Testament (Gen. 19:4-5; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Judges 19:22-23) it is shown to be sinful.

Some point out that Jesus never spoke about homosexuality at all and that in this passage Paul does not call it sin, but "against nature" and as an "error." But we have already shown that the whole point of Romans 1 here is to show that all people are in sin and deserving of death. In 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10 Paul includes homosexuality in lists of sins.

In verse 26 Paul says that God gave them up to “**vile passions**” or degrading lusts. The illustration of these shameful and disgraceful lusts is homosexual behavior. Paul makes it clear that both men and women engaged in this practice. The practice of homosexuality became so widespread in ancient Greece that it was considered normal and even desirable. Homosexuality was common in first century Rome, and is often spoken of without a sense of shame by Roman writers. Homosexuality was prohibited neither by religion nor law, and was acknowledged without shame. Many of the ancient Roman emperors openly practiced homosexuality. Paul was well aware of what it was.

Are homosexuals born that way? There is no scientific evidence to date to support that claim, although researchers have desperately been looking for it. But even if the inclination is genetic, it still is sin to practice it. Some may be genetically prone to heterosexual lust or to anger or alcohol addiction, but these are still sins. Even if we are genetically predisposed to a sin, we are responsible before God if we yield to that sin.

2. Homosexuality is itself the judgment of God.

The end of verse 27, “**receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.**”

Stuart Briscoe concludes this section by noting that

"The logic of Paul's argument should not be missed. Those who reject what they know of God in so doing divorce themselves from truth and reality. This means, among other things, that a person out of touch with the reality of God is out of touch with reality, period, including the truth about humanity. To be out of touch with the meaning of humanity means a crisis of identity which is demonstrated in many ways, not least in confusion about sexuality. When sexuality is misunderstood, the sheer power of unrestrained sexual drive and uneducated sexual insight will produce all manner of aberrant sexual behavior. In short, confusion about God breeds confusion about man, which breeds confusion about sexuality which produces sexual confusion and chaos. Far from being, as was fondly imagined by many, an enlightened age of sexual freedom, Paul showed his contemporaries that they lived in a dark day of divine wrath." (Romans, The Communicator's Commentary, p50-51)

God allows this whole process of widespread, unchecked sexual immorality to pervade a culture as a means of showing how empty and barren life is without Him. When people think they can find fulfillment in sex, God says, "Look, it won't work. But you won't believe that until you find out for yourself." So both women and men abandon God's order and God "abandons" them to sexual immorality. He lets women and then men indulge their fantasies. He stands back while they rush headlong off the cliff of unbridled lust to be broken on the jagged rocks of disobedience. Why? He does it because He knows that in the end they will be more unhappy than they were in the beginning. Only then hopefully will they begin to see their need for their Creator.

The healing of the homosexual soul, as with every other soul, will be the return of the glory God to its rightful place in our affections.

Biblical Counsel to the Church

1. Repent of the sin of rejecting homosexual people.

We must repent of the sin failing to love homosexuals, of rejecting them, ridiculing them, and failing to minister to those who struggle with homosexual temptation.

Do you remember when Jesus was teaching one day when they brought in before Him the woman who was caught in a sexual sin? All the religious people said, "Hey, Jesus, she's guilty. Let's stone her." Do you remember what Jesus did? He bent down and scribbled in the dirt. I wish I knew what He wrote in that dirt. I think it might have been the names of women all those guys had lusted after or some sins they had committed. But whatever it was, he said, "Let him who is without sin throw the first stone." They started dropping those stones and they left. I tell you what, when it comes to the sin of homosexuality, the church has been holding some big rocks.

2. Love people without condoning their sin.

Jesus did this so wonderfully. Look at Luke 15:2. The reason the religious people didn't like Jesus, it says, **"But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'**" Do you know what Jesus used to do? He used to relate to sinners for the express purpose seeing their lives changed. He didn't say, "Sinner, you change and then I'll relate to you." He related to them so they could experience change.

Do you remember when he went to Zacchaeus' house? He didn't say, "Zacchaeus, when you pay back all those taxes you've stolen, I'll come to your house for dinner." He said, "I'm coming to your house for dinner." And after Zacchaeus met Jesus, what did he do? He repaid all his debts. We make a mistake if we say to any sinner, whether they are an adulterer, fornicator or a homosexual, "Hey listen, clean up your act, then you can come to our church." We say, "Come to Jesus, come meet Jesus. And Jesus can change you from the inside out." We need to accept them without approving their sin.

3. Believe that God can forgive and change any sinner

Do you think there are going to be any people in heaven who committed murder? I think so. Moses will be there. He was a murderer. Do you think there are going to be any people in heaven who committed adultery? I think so because King David committed adultery. Do you think there are going to be any people who ever practiced homosexual behavior in heaven? I think so. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul writing to Christians said, **"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?"** Here is the list of those who won't be there: **"Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God."** Did you find yourself in that list? I did. But keep reading: **"And such were some of you."** Not are –were. What happened? **"But you were washed,"** that's salvation in the blood of Jesus. **"You were sanctified,"** that's the purifying work of the Holy Spirit. And **"you were justified,"** that's what faith does, **"in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."**

Our church needs to be a redemptive body that doesn't just stand on a soapbox and say, "Homosexuality is a sin." Although it is, we need to say, "It is a sin but Jesus Christ receives sinners and Jesus Christ can forgive sinners and Jesus Christ can change sinners. Look what he's done for us."

Listen we must stand for Biblical truth. But remember this: God has not called us to win elections, but to win souls and hearts and minds; He has not called us to control Congress, but to preach the gospel; He has not called us to be safe, but to tell the truth. He has not called us to avoid conflict, but to love everyone (1 Thessalonians 3:12). So

Speak the truth in love, entrust your cause to God, and keep the glory of God in the center of your soul.

Biblical Counsel to Parents

Now let me say a few words to parents.

1. For Christian parents, wayward children are more painful than a child's death. Because death usually is not intensified by feelings of guilt and failure and shame. How many of these feelings are legitimate is impossible to know for sure. The only hope for parents is the gospel - that whatever we have done poorly we may be forgiven by trusting in Christ for a righteousness that is not our own (Romans 1:16-17).
2. If we know our shortcomings, we should confess them to our children, and seek their forgiveness.
3. If we have grown children with homosexual desires we should love them and pray for them and speak Biblical truth to them when they will hear it.

Biblical Counsel for someone with same-sex attractions:

1. Acknowledge that our sinful world is out of order which includes the presence and pain of a disordered sexuality. Do not define your God-given personhood by your disordered sexuality.
2. Put your faith in Christ alone for the forgiveness of all your sins and for the gift of God's righteousness (Romans 1:16-17).
3. Make Jesus your Lord and reorder your entire life around the glory of God as your highest treasure.
4. Resolve to live a pure and, if necessary, celibate life by the power of God's Spirit, with the confidence that if God does not heal now, he will in the age to come; and all the patience of purity will be worth it (Romans 8:18).