

“GOD GAVE THEM UP.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

April 23, 2023, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Romans 1:24-32

Introduction.

As is our custom here at First Church we are preaching through a book of the Bible, Paul’s letter to the Christians in the church in Rome.

Paul wrote he is eager to come to Rome to preach the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He says this even knowing the kind of reception he has had and will have in Rome, but he is undaunted. He is eager to preach.

Why is he eager to preach? Two reasons, because of two revelations from God. *First*, because God has revealed His righteousness in the Gospel which is the power of God for salvation to everyone who hears and believes. *Second*, because the wrath of God is being revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness, and the Gospel is the only defense against the wrath of God.

Why has the wrath of God been revealed? What has stirred up the just and righteous wrath of God? Two things, ungodliness toward God and the unrighteousness of men. The vertical response to God and the horizontal response among men.

Regarding ungodliness, Paul says everyone knows there is a God with invisible attributes, with eternal power and divine nature, but they exchanged the truth about God for a lie. They did not honor God or give thanks to Him or worship Him as they all should.

Regarding unrighteousness, Paul says they also exchanged the glory of the immortal, incorruptible God for images of mortal, corruptible creatures, men, birds, and animals and the lowest of reptiles and worms. Notice the downward spiral.

Remember the first three chapters of Romans show us our need for the Gospel, our need for the grace of forgiveness. Chapter one forces on the Gentiles, chapter two focuses on the Jews, chapter three on everyone, all of us.

Verses 1:18-23 answer the question why does God pour out His just wrath on mankind, for their ungodliness and unrighteousness, for exchanging the truth for a lie, and worshiping creatures rather than the Creator in whose image we are made.

In the light of all of this we come to this big “therefore” or three “therefores.” Paul now answers how God’s wrath is revealed. He uses the same phrase three times, “God gave them up.”

Is there a more relevant passage in the Bible for our time and place in culture? Can there be a passage of Scripture more clearly needed for today?

Don't think for a minute Paul doesn't understand the times we live in. Don't think everything in Paul's day was different, or that we are somehow very different, we are more educated or sophisticated or broadminded.

Paul was not naïve, he lived in a culture saturated with sexual sin and homosexuality. Paul wrote this letter from Corinth, the sin capital of Asia. Greek and Roman culture were awash in homosexuality. Rome was an utterly decadent, wicked city. And like most decadent, wicked cities, Rome is proud of its decadence, totally aware of their sin.

Of the first 15 emperors of Rome only one was heterosexual. Nero had two public wedding ceremonies with two different men, and in one of them he took the role of the bride. There is nothing new under the sun. People who try to dismiss the first century as nothing like ours are wrong.

Before I wade into the text I want to say a word about how we consider passages in the Bible like this one. We want to speak the truth in love, that is maintaining a biblical balance between clear conviction about sin and patient compassion for sinners, of whom we all are. Paul gives an example of this in I Corinthians.

I Corinthians 6:9-11 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 effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. 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.

We are church full of sinners, every last one of us and we are all only saved by grace through faith in Jesus. All Christians are justified sinners daily doing battle with our sin. The church is meant to be a place where all sinners are welcome and where we help each other overcome our sin in the power of the Holy Spirit and God's Word.

May this be a place where everyone no matter how disorder their life, will find faith, hope, love, courage and power to live a righteous life. May none of us be ashamed of the Gospel, it is the only power of God for salvation to all who are living in sin. It is the Good news for the wrath of God against ungodliness.

1:24-25, Therefore, God gave them over to dishonoring their bodies.

Three times we read God gave them up, handed them over. This is personal, God personally does it. The sin is personally against God, so the judgment is personal. This is active, not passive, God personally does it.

God doesn't just let it happen, let them choose whatever they want to choose. They are not simply left to themselves, God gives them over. They don't just fall into sin, they don't just choose sin, God hands them over to their wicked lusts and depravity. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Verse 25 reminds us what the fundamental and foundational issue is. The sexual sin is the consequence of rejecting God, of exchanging the truth about God for a lie and worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator.

God's wrath is His personal, response to those who refuse to acknowledge Him and worship Him, those who worship creatures, worship corruptible things, worship what ought not to be worshipped, who willfully reject God, rebel against God, God's will, God's laws, God's Word, God's truth, those who hate God, who hate God's righteousness.

The fundamental truth of the universe is that God exists, He can be known because He has revealed Himself, and He should be worshipped and honored and praised.

The fundamental sin is failing to worship and honor God, who is our creator, in whose image we are made. All other sin flows from this sin.

Idolatry is adultery against God, it is whoring after other gods and other pleasures. Idolatry leads to sexual immorality.

Remember the great idolatry in the wilderness at the mountain of God when Aaron made the Golden Calf. That sin lead straight into an orgy of sexual immorality.

We normally think of the wrath or judgment of God as something that will be poured out by God on all sin at the end of time. We think of the judgment of God as something that is yet to come. And that is true, but it is not the whole truth.

Scripture warns us that the wrath of God is not just future but present. And the wrath of God is not just on sin, sin is the wrath of God. We are not just waiting for God to bring judgment on the sins of America and the world, the sins of America and the world are His very judgment.

Disordered worship leads to disordered desires and disordered actions. The punishment fits the crime. They dishonored God, so God gave them over to dishonoring their bodies in degrading sin. When they demean God, next they demean themselves.

1:26-27, For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions.

With this revelation of how God's wrath is actively being manifest in our world, the question can arise, why is there an emphasis on homosexuality? Homosexuality is clearly not the only sin for which the wrath of God is revealed. There is a reason why God does this.

In the spiritual realm the natural order is for the creature to worship the Creator. The unnatural, disordered thing is for the creature to worship another creature, for the creator to worship his creation.

As it is in the spiritual realm, so it is in the physical realm, there is a natural order and an unnatural order. When the natural order in the spiritual realm is disordered, the natural order in the physical realm is disordered and nothing makes this more clear than homosexuality.

What happens when you consciously reject the distinction between God and creation? When you destroy or deny the Creator/creation distinction, the curse is to destroy all other distinctions, as between male and female. When the vertical becomes disordered, the horizontal becomes disordered. The punishment is like the crime.

Notice God didn't give them up to an alternative lifestyle or a countercultural way of living. He gave them up to what is against nature, a disordered perversion of what was meant to be.

Earlier in Romans we saw God has two books, the book of nature and the book of Scripture. God doesn't just reveal Himself in Scripture, He reveals Himself in nature. God has made His power and divine nature evident in creation.

In nature God has revealed the natural use of the female by the male and the male by the female. The book of nature and the book of God both say the same thing, sex is binary.

It is coded into our DNA, into every single cell in our body. Anatomy, physiology, biology all testify to God's perfect plan. In the beginning God made us male and female, it is universal.

When God lets go of a culture what happens? What does it look like? It turns everything God gives or has done, upside down. This is the curse and chaos of our culture, to turn everything upside down, to invert God's structure.

Human beings are created to worship God. Idolatry is a perversion of that natural intention. It is a violation of what God intended.

Human beings are created by God to have sexual relations with the opposite sex, homosexuality is contrary to God's intention, it is a perversion, it is unnatural, against nature.

The whole debate surrounding gender confusion and sexual identity today is just a form of rebellion against God and our God-assigned sex. At the very moment of conception God assigns us a sex, He appoints us to be male or female. One of our callings is to live that out, to embrace His purposeful design and honor Him by honoring our sex, to be fully masculine or fully feminine.

We could say our first earthly calling is to be who God created us to be. No wonder a world in rebellion against God will also rebel against His calling, His purpose, His design.

Transgender is a lie. God assigns male and female at the moment of conception. Either we obey or we rebel against this calling. It is never Christian, nor even compassionate, to help someone repudiate their sexual calling assigned them by God.

Marrying your own sex is never love. Making it legal is not kindness, but cruelty. It is just legalized protection from salvation.

Paul minces no words here. God's binary order for the sexes, for male and female is natural. Homosexual relations are unnatural, a violation of the natural created order. There is no such thing as homosexual orientation, only homosexual sin. We are all oriented to sin and that is never justifies sin.

Paul makes this clear in this text.

First, they exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature.
Second, they were consumed with passion, burning with desire/lust for other men.
Third, they committed shameless acts, they did that which should be shameful.
Fourth, they did what ought not to be done.

They do such things with reckless abandon, burning with desire. They do such things without embarrassment, without shame, with pride. They do such things without regard for the consequences, receiving the due penalty of their sin, and deserving to die.

Vs. 27 Due penalty.

The main point Paul is making is that the penalty is deserved, it is due them. He doesn't discuss what kind of penalty but context shows that it is most likely the judgment of God at being handed over.

The punishment of sin is sin. The penalty is being handed over to the sin of homosexuality.

The foundational sin is the rejection of the true God for idols and refusing to give thanks to God and glorify Him. Those who become blind to the light of the glory of God, become blind to what leads to their own destruction.

The due penalty of all sin is the gnawing dissatisfaction, the wasting of our souls, nagging guilt and shame, and all the physical and moral consequences.

Homosexuality is God's judgment on the human race for exchanging the truth about God for a lie, and exchanging the glory of immortal God for idolatry.

Homosexuality is the fruit of false worship, of worshiping self rather than God. Gay Pride parades are a picture of what worshipping the creature looks like.

Implications and application.

Exchanging the truth of God for a lie.

We exchange the truth of God for a lie when we say you can be a gay Christian, just not practicing it. That is a lie. Would you put any of the other sins listed here in front of Christian? Arrogant Christian, thieving Christian, murdering Christian, slanderous Christian.

We talk about speaking the truth in love. You can't do that if you don't speak the truth, don't call sin sin, don't call the sin what it really is, dishonorable, degrading, unnatural, shameful, a sign of God handing one over to sin.

We exchange the truth for a lie when we say homosexuals can live in a loving, monogamous same sex relationship.

We exchange the truth for a lie when we say you can be transgender, you can change your sex. It is scientifically impossible, and it is morally wrong and spiritually rebellious against the authority of God who has assigned us our sex from conception.

We exchange the truth for a lie when we watch porn and say no one is hurt, it's no big deal. It is both adultery and idolatry, worshiping pleasure and the creature, rather than God.

We all have rebellious hearts. We are all just like the homosexual, in following our own lusts, our own perverse and immoral thoughts and desires. We indulge sexual fantasies, or pursue lust in movies and the internet, looking at naked flesh, shamelessly consuming whatever the world offers us.

We exchange the truth for a lie when we are disordered in our marriages, when husbands are slothful, lazy, not taking responsibility to lead their families; and when wives dishonor or disrespect their husbands and resist their godly leadership, when children disobey.

Here is the question. Why did God put this here, why did God write this? Is it because God is mean, God is a hater, or is it because God loves us with an infinitely great love and wants us to know the truth because our eternal lives are at stake?

Some of you may know the name, Rosario Butterfield. She was a professor of English at Syracuse University in New York. She was a self-proclaimed lesbian and feminist activist. She was 35 the first time she read Romans 1. She thought it was dangerous hate speech designed to ruin her life. But then God used Romans 1 to bring her to repentance and faith in Jesus. By God's Spirit He showed her what she was calling love was actually not just lust, but defilement and degradation. She came to see these words as God's expression of love for her. The word of God is living and active and life changing and soul saving.

Homosexuality is not a disease or a sickness, it is a sin. And for that reason, there is hope. It is a sin from which there is the hope of recovery (I Cor. 6:11). If we repent and confess our sin, God will cleanse us from all our unrighteousness.

I am not ashamed of the Gospel that has that kind of power. I am eager to preach this Gospel to you for the salvation and edification of your souls. That you might be saved and that you might be sanctified as you grow in the knowledge of the truth and the will of God for your life.

Don't stop loving those trapped in sin, don't stop praying for those given over to wickedness. God can and does deliver us from sin. The blood of Jesus is stronger than all sin. Where sin abounds, grace abounds more.