

# Ministry of Grace Church

## Romans 1:24-32 - Sermon Notes



### Background

During our last look into the book of Romans we learned that people who deny that there is a God ignore the obvious evidence. Paul told us,

because 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, both His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

As we will learn today, God deals directly and harshly with those who deny Him. But - you may say "Our God is a loving God! And He is a merciful God!" Yes, but He is also a Righteous God, which means that He always does what is right. And since He is also a Holy God, He must deal with sin.

But He doesn't always take action immediately because, as Peter teaches us:

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some consider slowness, but is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

In today's scripture passage, Paul gets direct and specific about what God thinks of homosexuality. He makes it very clear that homosexuality is sinful. In fact, He says that homosexuality is shameful, indecent, and obscene.

Now, in order to fully understand what Paul has to say in the current section of Romans chapter one, let's review the verses we ended with last time:

For even though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the

likeness of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.  
(Romans 1:21-23)

He is referring to those who ignore the evidence that is right in front of them. So, how does God respond to these people who ignore His obvious existence? Here's how.

### **Romans 1:24-25**

**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.**

The expression “gave them over” is translated from the Greek word *paredōken*, which means “to give over to someone or something” or “to surrender something to another.”

Earlier we were told that these people became vain and that their heart was darkened. We noted at that time that these actions were expressed in the passive voice, indicating that these things were done **to** them. In the previous verses it was implied that it is God who did these things to them. In the current verses it is no longer an implication, but a clear statement.

God says that because these people have decided to worship idols of created things (including the worship of man himself) instead of the creator of all things, He “gave them over.” In other words, He surrendered them. And what did God surrender them to? He surrendered them to the uncleanness of their own lusts. God did not force them to indulge in unclean practices, fulfilling their wicked lusts; He simply stopped preventing them. He allowed them to do these things. In effect, He let go of the reigns and let them do what their own inner desires were driving them to do. The actions of their lusts involve their bodies in a way that is dishonoring to themselves and even against nature itself, according to verse 26.

The point is, because these people refuse to give God his rightful place in their lives, God lets them have their way and allows them to be completely controlled by their sinful desires.

Notice that this is just the first of God’s “giving them over.” In this verse He surrenders them to uncleanness. In verse 26 He surrenders them to dishonoring passions and in verse 28 He surrenders them to a worthless mind. This explains a lot about what is happening in Western society today as secular humanism has continued to spread. We, as a society, have not given God His rightful place and, as a result, He has allowed our society to decline into a state where satisfying self is the prime directive.

The real tragedy is that this type of thinking has even invaded the Church and the lives of many Christians! Do you remember the “lies of secular humanism vs. God’s truth” that we talked about last time? One of them was: Secular Humanism believes that the goal of life is self satisfaction. God says that the goal in life is selfless submission to Christ.

Paul tells us here that, “they exchanged the truth of God for a lie.” This appears to be a restatement of verse 23, but there is a significant difference. In verse 23 he said they “exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God” and in this verse he says they, “exchanged the truth of God.” Thus verse 23 says that they changed the reputation or splendor of God into an image. So, we see that in verse 23 those who deny God and His power use an image for worship, which is a representation of a created thing. In this verse they have progressed to the point where they now deny the truth that Yahweh is the one and only God who is to be revered and worshipped. Paul says that those who deny God’s existence convert that truth into a lie (actually, the Greek text says “the lie”). [See 2 Thessalonians 2]

According to Paul, these non-believers both worship and serve the created thing more than the creator of all things. Why do they do this? Because they don't want to submit to The Almighty God. Instead, they are willing to submit to a false god, knowing all the time that it really is no god at all. In the secular humanism of today, they make man the god and worship and serve self rather than the creator. Therefore, the lie that is being subtly propagated today is, "since we have evolved from lower life forms and there is no proof of a creator, we are the supreme beings (i.e. we are gods).

Paul now does an interesting thing in this passage. As he finishes this comparison of false gods and the true God, he is so focused on the divinity, majesty, and holiness of God (the *doxa*, or glory, of God), that he is compelled to proclaim a "doxology," ascribing praise to God. It is almost as if he is once again so struck with the very truth he is proclaiming, that he is compelled to give God the glory He is due. And he follows it with a proclamation of *amen*, meaning "it is so!"

### **Romans 1:26-27**

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

Paul is talking about those who have rejected the evidence of the one true God and have decided to worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator. In verse 24 Paul said because they exchanged the glory of God for idols, God surrendered them to the uncleanness that is in their hearts, driving them to dishonor their bodies between themselves.

Now, because they refuse to acknowledge their creator, God surrendered them to unnatural and disgraceful passions. And what are these disgraceful passions? One of them is, "their females exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural." The word translated "females" is *thēlus*. This is the word which is used in expressing a gender, meaning "female." The usual word for woman or wife is *gunē*. What Paul is saying is that these females gave up normal sexual intercourse within the confines of marriage for a form of sex that is contrary to that which would produce children.

These females developed a view of sex that is simply a physical act rather than an expression of deep devotion between a husband and his wife. With this unnatural view of sex, all kinds of perversion become possible to the depraved mind of godless people. Based on the specific words used here and what Paul says in the verse that follows, it is quite certain that he is referring to female homosexuality. And Paul gets even more graphic, though tastefully so, in the following verse about what the men have done.

Paul has leveled a clear condemnation against females who have rejected God and his truth by describing their sexually perverse use of their bodies as objects of sexuality solely for pleasure's sake. Now he describes in even more detail the sexual wickedness of males once the restraints of decency and morality have been cast off.

He starts out with "In the same way also." These are conjunctive words which imply a very strong connection between the two verses. In other words, the actions of the females and the actions of the males are equally joined together in their wickedness and filthiness in God's eyes. Throughout this section Paul has avoided using the words for men and women. Instead, he used the words "males" and "females" as if to insinuate that they are less than human.

What he says about the males, however, is even more descriptive of homosexuality than what he said about the females. Paul says that these males have put aside the natural use of females for sexual intercourse and have turned to other males to satisfy their overpowering selfish sexual passion.

He says that these people, “burned in their desire toward one another.” The word translated “desire” is not the word that is normally used for lust or strong physical desire. That would be the word, *epithumia*. Instead, Paul uses the word *orexis*, which also means a strong desire or lust, but it carries with it the notion of “reaching out after an object with the purpose of taking it for oneself and appropriating it.” This is a lust with a selfish possessiveness mixed in.

Notice the way Paul has carefully described the wickedness in this verse, being descriptive enough to make it absolutely clear what he is talking about without getting graphic to the point of crudity.

### **Romans 1:28-31**

**And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to an unfit mind, to do those things which are not proper, having been filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, violent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;**

The words, “see fit” are a form of *dokimadzō*, which means to “judge or examine with the intent of finding good.” It is the word used of testing gold to determine its value. We could paraphrase this as, “because they determined in their own minds not to acknowledge God ...” And, “unfit” is translated from *adokimon* which means a mind or intellect that is incapable of discerning or judging.

Here we see the result of sinful man resisting the love of Almighty God. These people who have intentionally rejected the position and power of God, have also determined that they don’t believe in Him. They don’t believe that He exists!

As a result, God gives them over to a mind which is incapable of discerning good. Do you see the play on words here? Paul is saying that since these rejecters of God have determined, or judged, (*dokimadzō*) not to believe in God, He surrendered them to a mind that is incapable of judging (*adokimadzō*). As a result, they will do those things which are inappropriate, and they become even more ungodly.

There’s a warning here from a loving God who has sacrificed His own son to reconcile sinful man to Himself. If we continue to reject His offer, at some point He will surrender us to our own sinfulness so that we can no longer make accurate judgments about what is right and and what is wrong.

“But,” you may ask, “how can a loving God give up on anyone?” The answer is that God knows our heart, and if we are determined to reject Him and His message, He will allow us to do just that, with eternal consequences! And that’s not just what some Bible thumpin’ theologian says, it’s what the Apostle Paul teaches. Yes, our God is a loving God. He sent His only Son to die a horrible death so that you and I can have a personal relationship with Him. But He is also a jealous God, and if a person resists and rejects His love enough, God will judge him or her with eternity in Hell.

## **Romans 1:32**

**and although they know the righteous requirement 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.**

Paul now gives a final word of condemnation concerning those who deny God. He says that those who reject Him are not only filled with all kinds of sinfulness, but they also know better. Paul says they know the righteous judgment of God. That is, they recognize, or realize, that God has already proclaimed something to be true.

And that something is explained in the next phrase, “**that those who practice such things are worthy of death.**” These God haters know that those who do the things they are doing (not just occasionally, but repeatedly) are guilty of sins that are worthy of death in God’s mind.

But Paul doesn’t stop there. He says that these people not only repeatedly do these things themselves, but they take pleasure in others who do the same. So, what Paul is telling us is, not only do these people realize what God thinks of the things they are doing habitually (that such sins are worthy of death), but they feel gratified with others who practice such things as well. In other words, they feel camaraderie with other sinners who are doing the same things.

The interesting thing is that when these people are in the presence of someone living a life submitted to God, they don’t feel camaraderie, they feel conviction! They don’t want the light of God shining on their darkness. This is precisely what our Lord said regarding those who reject Him:

**This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. (John 3:19)**

When we witness (either by word or by deed) to those who are sold out to sin, it convicts them, and they don’t like it (or us).

## **So What?**

Let’s not allow ourselves to be seduced into thinking like the world system. God did not create us to serve our own lusts. He created us to serve Him. Instead of serving ourselves, let us give God His rightful place through our worship and praise of Him and through our submission to His will.

Have you bought into the lie that we are the highest form of evolved creatures? Or - do you find yourself awestruck by the divinity, majesty, power, holiness, and love of God? Or do you find yourself somewhere in between, not accepting the lie but not in awe of our Creator God either? The way that you answer these questions says a lot about your relationship with the God who sent His Son to die so that we can know Him personally.

There is absolutely no doubt what Paul (therefore, God) thinks of homosexuality. He says it is shameful, indecent, obscene, and disgraceful! Yet, in our Western society, the gay rights activists are trying to convince us that there is nothing wrong with it, that it’s simply a personal preference. God says it is wicked sinfulness!

We just learned that since these rejecters of God did not want to retain God in their knowledge, He surrendered them to a condition where they became incapable of making good judgments. The result of this is that they do those things which are inappropriate. Then, after they were surrendered by God to a mind incapable of discerning what is right, they were filled with a host of personal characteristics as described above. Is it any wonder that the foes of God in this world will go to

any length to discredit and destroy the church and anyone who professes a relationship with God? And this is only a partial list of personal characteristics of those who reject God.

Lest we get too high on our own pedestal, let me remind you that all of us are capable of these things. They are part of our sin nature, and any of these things can rear its ugly head in any one of us when we get away from that close relationship with God, our Father. The difference is that we know God, and we can confess our sinfulness to Him, knowing that we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one, whose blood cleanses us from all sin.

They, on the other hand, have rejected God and have no one to turn to for cleansing or mercy. And someday they will face the Judge, the One whom they have rejected, and He will show them no mercy!

In this list, we can see many of the characteristics that we were guilty of ourselves before we were saved and to which we gravitate when we are not under the control of the Holy Spirit.

The worst of these personal characteristics listed here, I suppose, is “haters of God.” This word means not just to feel hatred but to show hatred as well. That anyone would openly hate the all-powerful Creator of all things and the Judge of all mankind is foolish. It is also one of the most self-condemning actions a person can do. To disbelieve in the existence of God is one thing, but to hate God you have to believe that He exists, otherwise there is no object of your hatred. Remember that Paul began this part of his message back in verse 20 where he said,

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, both His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

According to this, there really is no such thing as an atheist (one who doesn't believe that there is a God), only those who claim to be atheists. One day at the Great White Throne Judgment they will stand before the very God they claim doesn't exist (the one they actively hate) and they will be condemned to eternity in hell for their unbelief!

Paul has given us an extensive three verse list of selfishly sinful characteristics. I dare say there are few people, if any, who display all of these characteristics. It's bad enough that they should be filled with only a few. This is the sin nature at war against God Himself, a sin nature that we all have. Listen to this description of Rome at the time that Paul was writing. This was written by a man named Seneca, one of the purest moralists of Rome. He said of his own time:

All is full of criminality and vice; indeed much more of these is committed than can be remedied by force. A monstrous contest of abandoned wickedness is carried on. The lust of sin increases daily; and shame is daily more and more extinguished. Discarding respect for all that is good and sacred, lust rushes on wherever it will. Vice no longer hides itself. It stalks forth before all eyes. So public has abandoned wickedness become, and so openly does it flame up in the minds of all, that innocence is no longer seldom, but has wholly ceased to exist.

Our own society is heading that same direction today. It becomes more obvious with each passing year. We Christians must maintain a witness and not be sucked into these same characteristics. But only through the power of the Spirit can we resist our natural sinful tendencies to do all of these things.

Let's pray.