

Trevor Slide

Prayerfully condemn the violence that happened in Israel.

Luke 21:26-28

People will faint from fear and expectation of the things that are coming on the world, because the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 But when these things begin to take place, stand up and lift your heads, because your redemption is near.”

Luke 21:33

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Prayer

Well, the topics today are not going to get any lighter...but God has buckets of hope and grace to go along with that.

As Jesus said, I have come to give you peace. In this world you will find suffering But - but take heart- I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

Romans Series Slide

Today will not be an easy text. Not because I think the interpretation of the text is particularly tricky. But rather- the 21st century Western context that we all soak in has made it tricky for US.

For some of you today-by the end of this message- you will undoubtedly want me to say more.

Others of you, will wish I would have said less- or just skipped it altogether.

I gladly, accept that responsibility to bear that burden as a leader. Particularly- as a shepherd of this church.

My job is never, has never, and will never be to preach to you what you or I WANT to hear. Rather- it is to preach to you the Word of the Lord- with respect to the God that is behind it and has revealed himself to us through it.

Today- because we're following the text in Romans- we will be talking about sexuality- homosexuality in specific- and we will talk about it in the context in which its delivered in Paul's letter to the church in Rome.

For parents of our 4th-6th graders in the room- I want you to know that I think this message from the Scripture is good for your child to hear. No doubt, they are hearing other messages about this from tv, movies, books, school, friends, the internet, any time they go shopping, etc. I think its good that they understand what the Scripture says about sexuality from you...and I think that its good that they know that their

church follows the Word of God and that God cares about the way we use our bodies...and our money, and our words, as this text will bear out.

I do not plan to be crude or overtly graphic, that said- the text will lead me to address issues of sexuality.

I respect your decision if you choose- during the moment of silence-to quietly exit.

For those struggling with sexual sin in your life- particularly those of you who may be attracted to the same sex- I understand that this message can be hard for you. But I believe you will find deep hope and comfort from Jesus in it.

For those who don't struggle with sexual sin in your life...particularly with SSA, I am certain you will find included in the things Paul lists here in this text something you can recognize in your life...and I believe you will find deep hope and comfort from Jesus.

This is not a passage- nor is any passage in Scripture- a reason to hate or alienate a person. Nor is it reason to fear. Rather- like the entirety of Scripture- God is patient and slow to anger wanting all to repent and come to him.

The answer is NEVER to make a text say what you want it to say- but to let God speak....and recognize Jesus as Lord.

All in all- my prayer is that we can say with a healthy amen at the end of this sermon- "I am a great sinner. But Jesus is a greater savior."

Moment of Silence

Title Slide- "Delivered Over: How a Corrupt Mind Thinks About Right & Wrong"- Romans 1:24-32

Think for a minute about the context that we find ourselves in in Romans as we have talked about over the last month or so. Paul's argument up to this point has been that every human being has what they need in the world around us to come to the conclusion that there is a creator outside of us that intentionally designed the world and everything in it for a purpose.

He says- THAT is supposed to lead us to search for God- and as God reveals himself to us- we will find him.

However- because we don't want an authority over us...we resist that leading, by suppressing the truth. We hold it down. We rationalize it. We justify ourselves and our actions in order to not have an authority over us. To be our own bosses.

Remember though- the basketball pushed down under water will eventually come up and hit you in the face. That's what the truth does.

If there is objectively a brick wall in front of you- you can argue, debate, rationalize, close your eyes, believe in magic...even if somehow you can convince yourself that there is not a brick wall in front of you...if you run full speed ahead...the truth is going to hit you squarely in the face.

This is what Paul means in Romans 1 when he talks about nature. Its not necessarily trees and birds and things...rather it is the NATURE of the way God made things to be. Their telos. Their purpose. You can observe the world- and it leads you not only to the existence of God...but to a moral sense of what is right and wrong.

The other way the truth that we suppress comes back to hit us in the face is that we are created by God to be worshippers.so no matter how hard we try to NOT worship... we always are worshipping. To worship means to give ultimate worth and weight to something. So, if I worship money- I'm going to make all my decisions by evaluating how I best keep my money.

If I worship people's approval- I'll make my decisions based on what makes other people happy.

The fact is, from Bob Dylan to David Foster Wallace...it doesn't take a Christian or a theist to admit... everybody worships something.

The question is not whether you *are* worshipping something...the only question is whether you are AWARE of what you worship.

Paul's entire point in bringing any of that stuff up is to underscore the point that

v16-17

Our right relational standing with God cannot come from our own works...it cannot come from us "getting it right". Rather it has to come from God himself becoming flesh and taking the just penalty for our sin- death on a cross. IN that, he makes an exchange with us- Jesus takes our sin, our guilt, our shame, our death- and by trusting him, following him, saying yes to his invitation- we unite ourselves to Jesus in such a way that we receive the credit for his right standing with God the Father and therefore are no longer condemned for our sin of worshipping other gods.

SO, please remember. That is the entire context for the reason that Paul gives all this bad news we are about to read. Essentially- he's giving the bad news to make the good news even better.

He's highlighting the GLORY of the grace of God given to sinners like you and me!

Its like if I handed you a bunch of boards, and hammers and nails. You'd think- Ok, these might be useful. Then I showed you the weather forecast that showed a

hurricane coming..suddenly you become a lot more grateful for the gift I gave you because you understand how needed boards and hammers and nails are in a hurricane to protect your house.

In v 16-17- Paul gave the good news- the boards and nails.

In our passage today- he's telling us about the hurricane.

And we can say "Why so negative?" or "This is too harsh and I don't feel good about it"...but without it- you'll miss how gracious and loving God is. You will miss the "Good" part of the Good News.

This passage is not...and has never been...a passage intended to communicate to any group of people- that they were beyond the reach of God's grace. Rather- its here to communicate the exact opposite.

2:1

In fact- take a peek at Romans 2- Paul starts off with a little "gotcha" verse- If you judge- it means you know the moral standard- and that moral standard applies to your idolatry too.

And you can follow that right into chapter 3...

3:10-12

Where Paul quotes a couple of Psalms and says- There is NO ONE righteous. Every single person needs the grace of God...needs Jesus in their place.

So whatever we do with this passage- one thing that Paul won't let us do is grab this and use it to say "By nature- there is a group of people that cannot be saved by God. and should be outright rejected by you."

Because if there is a group that is outside of God's reach...it means that I am outside of God's reach.

Ok- that sets us up for these verses now. So let's pick up now in v 24 of Romans 1 and read to the end of the chapter.

Romans 1:24-32

24 Therefore God delivered them over in the desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen.

26 For this reason God delivered them over to disgraceful passions. Their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27 The men in the same way also

left natural relations with women and were inflamed in their lust for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their error.

28 And because they did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God, God delivered them over to a corrupt mind so that they do what is not right. 29 They are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness. They are full of envy, murder, quarrels, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 senseless, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful. 32 Although they know God's just sentence — that those who practice such things deserve to die — they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them.

Transition:

Here's what I want us to do now.

We're going to talk about the meaning of this passage-...then I want to talk about God's grace and our hope.

Just 2 points...First the meaning.

1) A corrupt mind pathologizes the natural & naturalizes the pathological.

It has become a moral evil in the world we live in to say something or someone is broken.

Other things- it has become a moral good to label as broken...even if they aren't.

That's what I mean by a pathology. Something is broken. Not as it should be.

Natural- means the way that God ordered the world.

Pathological- means the brokenness or twisting of the created order that sin brings.

This is what Paul is writing about here.

For example. Its a good thing generally that we as a culture have recognized that there is a brokenness- a pathology called "Depression". We have embraced that as a culture. That chemicals in the brain can be so off from the way God intended- that you are dealing with a pathology...an illness. So we have recognized that its not always helpful to say to someone..."Just cheer up" or "Just read the Bible more". We have done the same thing with anxiety. Indeed- there are mental and physical pathologies that can have the brain and body respond with anxiety that is not proportional to the environment or situation someone is in. And as a society- we have recognized that. We are ok with saying a phrase like "I have depression." or "I have anxiety". And we mean that as a dis-order- recognizing it is not the way it is supposed to be. And when we say that- we do not mean it in a moral sense. As if someone caused that particular disorder in themselves.

However- from adults down to children- we talk so much about that pathology- that many times we misunderstand and mislabel the natural order of our emotions.

It is natural to be anxious before you give a big presentation...or ask someone to prom...or play in a big game...or preach on Romans 1:24-32.

It does not, however, mean you are having a panic attack.

It is NATURAL to have an extended period of sadness during an extremely difficult season in your life.

But, especially in our children- we are pathologizing those natural emotions and calling them broken....especially if we as parents have the pathology- often we can map it onto our kids.

Our children now, our teens especially- don't say as much "I'm sad" or "I'm nervous" as much as they will say "I have depression" or "I have anxiety". In some instances- it pathologizes the natural. It brings a sense of IDENTITY in that brokenness that may not be necessary.

This was, and continues to be, prevalent with lots of men. As a society, we pathologized natural emotions like sadness or fear- saying "REAL MEN don't feel those FEELINGS"...instead of being honest about what is natural- which is to be sad, to cry from time to time...and to be afraid.

So- its good to call what is broken- broken. And the only way you know its broken- is if you have an idea of what it means that something is whole- or complete- or ordered as God intended it to be.

Now- to the text.

v 24- 25

We are reminded that we are talking about idolatry. The exchange of the truth of God for a lie- understanding what is broken as whole and what is whole as broken- and he says they worshipped what is created...instead of the creator. In other words- they- meaning the unrighteous- or all of us- exchanged looking to a creator for our love, and wholeness, and authority...and we all submitted ourselves to creation- which is broken by sin. And so he says- God delivered us over to our desires. The word "lust" is epithymia-(eppy THIGH ME-AH)- which is an over desire. A desire that we believe we have to have it or we'll die. We believe its a part of the natural order of things so its a basic human right for me to get it.

And in that lust- that over-desire breaks us further.

v 28

Paul calls it a corrupt mind that does what is not right. So the moral order completely breaks apart to where the natural is pathologized...said to be bad...and the pathological- the broken- is said to be good- or to bring about human flourishing... wholeness righteousness.

v 32

Paul says- not only do we call the broken fixed and the fixed broken. Not only do we call evil good and good evil...The whole time we KNOW, deep down, that something is off. We are justifying and convincing ourselves of it. We have a general sense of something being off even as we twist God's natural order.

And note the way he says we will justify this. The way he says we will sweep that feeling under the rug is...

Through social pressure.

That's what applauding others means.

That word translated "applaud" literally means to agree with or approve of. That's social pressure. If I can find a lot of people doing this...and we can celebrate it together... then it will be much easier for me to ignore the natural order of things.

Deep down- I need others to celebrate my idol with me...because it helps me suppress the truth.

If together...my group...or our society can Pathologize the natural...and naturalize the pathological- then if we can make the evil thing we want to do a good thing...and make the good thing we want to do evil- if I have a lot of friends that will affirm my suppressing of the truth...then I can get what I want without the guilt, or shame that naturally comes from my action.

Paul already has said...that truth...will come back to hit you in the face.

Back to 1)

One more word of caution- before we tackle the verses that are the most controversial in our day.

There is a difference between BEING broken...and using your brokenness to excuse your sin.

There is a difference from a STATE of brokenness...and the sinful ACTION that it tempts you toward.

There is a difference between stating something that is true about you "I'm broken" and adopting that brokenness as a core part of your identity...in the sense you are calling it a good thing.

For example. It is not a SIN to be depressed. It is a sin to neglect your children. While one may lead to the other...it is never an EXCUSE or justification for sin. While we can UNDERSTAND someone better by understanding their brokenness. It doesn't mean we justify sin with brokenness.

Additionally, imagine a mother or father who is depressed (a pathology) who day after day fails to go to the grocery store to get food, or prepare food, and neglects their children (a sin). When we learn of it, our first move is not to say, "We've got to make sure this depressed person doesn't get other people thinking like them." Or "Make sure that depressed person knows that it's a sin, and a really bad one, to neglect your children."

No. The church is going to rally around that person, acknowledge their pathology, understand that a person with that pathology desperately needs other people to walk with them through their brokenness...and we look at how their sin has affected them and others (namely their children) and we seek to restore and bring life back to the people who have been hurt by their sin...as we also encourage and support their repentance.

That doesn't mean that we ever call their evil- good. And we don't just look at their depression and say- there is nothing wrong with you. NOR do we say, well- you're depressed and depressed people need to neglect their children...so go ahead.

No...as the church- we acknowledge the brokenness...understand the person...name the sin...and throw everything we got at helping a person walk in repentance toward Jesus...with all the rest of us who are doing the same thing.

OK ANNNNNNNND NOW....

v 26-27

This is the most extensive and direct passage in the Bible about homosexual acts.

Notice here- that what Paul points out is not a state of being. He is talking about acting out sexually. Yes, he mentions desire- but that word is the word for LUST.

In other words- he is indicating here that to be sexually attracted to the same sex is not natural- it's broken. But that is not the sin. That's the brokenness. The sin BTW- in all sexual immorality- is the LUSTING...and/or the action that is outside of God's design for sex- which is- One man, One woman in a binding marriage covenant that lasts until death...that is the ONLY context for God glorifying sexual activity of any kind. According to the Scripture.

The purpose of sex, that proceeds from the nature of GOD...As I preached to you before as we have worked it out from the Scripture- is for pleasure, procreation- (making babies)- and marital bonding. It is reserved by God for one woman and one

man (according to the Scripture- gender difference is absolute fundamental to marriage) inside a marriage covenant because THAT covenant is to be a sign of God's love for his people.

You can go back to the first of our Sex, Gender & Spiritual renewal series to the sermon entitled "Ordinarily Fantastic" for a complete breakdown of that idea.

Now- this does not mean that inside of a marriage- that sexual immorality doesn't happen. Absolutely a man or woman can lust in a sinful way for their spouse. That reduces them down to a mere satisfying of a desire instead of seeking to give to the other as a person. In other words- marriage does not automatically erase sexual immorality.

I digress.

Back to the passage.

Paul is saying here that one of the results of God giving us over to our lusts...the results of the fall- is that we develop unnatural sexual patterns.

Paul is not picking on Homosexuality here. He's not saying, "If you have sex with a person of the same gender- you have committed a greater sin"...he is saying it because it is a clear example of the rejection of God's order in creation being turned on its head.

In the last 40-50 years, many people, including some biblical scholars have said- what Paul is referring to is lustful promiscuity or domination or rape, masters forcing slaves to have sex with them. And Paul had no concept of what we know today as gay marriage, where two people can be loving and committed to each other."

That is simply not true.

Notice that Paul uses generic terms for men & women. In Greek, when active/passive power differentials are described- like would be used in rape or slavery context...the words *erases* and *eromenos* would describe each partner. But Paul doesn't use those terms. There were terms in Paul's day for all of those relationships. There were terms for male and female prostitution. Paul knew about those sorts of relationships...but he does not use them. He uses language rather of mutuality.

He talks about women inflamed with lust for ONE ANOTHER. and men committing acts with OTHER MEN. That doesn't make sense if Paul has some sort of victim and abuser in mind. He wouldn't lump them in together.

Additionally, he brings female-to -female sexual acts to the table which would eliminate the common practice of rape that this sometimes is said to refer to.

Not to mention that we have multiple historical references that show that people saw and knew about men and women who were in committed sexual relationships with one another in this time. Both from documents from antiquity and from their art.

It simply is not good scholarly work to file what Paul says under the category of rape or sex with power differentials. The most plain and comprehensible understanding of the text...in its context within Romans and its context historically is that Paul is talking about men having any sex with men and women having any sex with women as a twisting of God's design..and those acts he says are sin.

The very nature of those acts is sinful. There is no societal structure, no societal agreement that can transform those acts into righteousness. They are broken twists of God's creation.

Now- I cannot underscore enough here that Paul is NOT talking about a person who is merely attracted to the same sex. That attraction is broken...but it is in itself not sin.

At this point, I want to recognize that I'm not going to address every objection or question you might have about this passage. Or other parts of Scripture and their interpretations. I would though highly recommend the book

**"Does the Bible Support Same-Sex Marriage?: 21 conversations from a Historically Christian View.
" by Preston Sprinkle.**

What I love about that book- it was just released a few months ago- is that the aim of the book is not to win arguments- but to lovingly have conversations. And to understand where people are coming from.

Now watch what Paul does next. Remember- he is taking people from what would have been for them (and should be for us) an obvious example of the twisting of creation...using the natural body in a way that doesn't produce life...and he now applies it to examples of sin that people might make excuses for.

v 29

He applies it to greed. This is a breakdown in the economic order. God intends us to share our resources...to let them freely flow- we turn it upside down and hold onto our resources...as if they are our gods that will save us. We are responding to the brokenness of creation in not easily producing crops. Or the unfairness of working hard and not making a lot of money. OR the unfairness of making more money than someone else who works just as hard and thinking "I earned this...I get to do with it what I want."

Contrast that with what you see in the church in Acts 2- where people gladly shared their possessions and gave as people had need.

There is also social and relational disorder in here.
envy, murder, gossip, lying slandering.

Contrast that with the word of God at creation where God speaks and order comes into chaos. Or with Jesus who speaks grace and truth. Or with the NT church who is commanded to speak with love, even into sin, to bring about the fruit of repentance. To build one another up.

v 30-31

There is spiritual disorder in here. God haters...proud...I do this by myself...I don't need nobody's help. That is a spiritual disfunction and sin that says "god is an opiate for the weak. I am strong. I am my own God."

There is also familial disorder.

Unloving, unmerciful, untrustworthy. ...all the things it takes to be a family where a person feels secure love. This is who the church is called to be in contrast to the disorder of the world.

And remember- Paul gives the UNNATURAL SEXUAL DISORDER as the first representative of how we get everything else turned upside down economically, socially, spiritually, and familally...calling what is broken whole...and what is whole broken.

Back to 1)

In other words- all of us have practiced and given ourselves over to practices where we reject God and do things our way...and that is not only a result of us embracing the broken world as whole...but it also echos and causes brokenness in others.

A world where procreation is removed from sex...where marriage is only about individuals fullfilling their sexual desires or exploring their sexual compatibility- that is literally breaking down societal order. Look at what birthrate decline is doing and will do to countries that have fallen below the replacement rate. BTW, for the first time in history- that includes the USA.

A world where we call greed good... has victims. We can relabel it capitalism or the free market- but when the free market becomes our God- it breaks the social fabric and has deathly consequences.

Think about what slander or gossip or being disobedient to parents does to a micro-society- like a church- or a macro society- like a country. Actually, I could give you examples of that from community groups in our church...and I could give you examples of that from our political system.

Here's the point Paul is making...and its the one I'm making.

Our role- as the church- is to live out the wholeness that God intends...it is to be a community that not only holds a sexual ethic that brings about flourishing and life...but also to be a community of generous truth-tellers that are trustworthy, encouraging, loving and merciful...that obey our parents, respect authority as its given by God...that is unified and lifts up rather than tears down.

Listen, what Paul says here offends the socially and theologically liberal and often the socially and theologically conservative.

On one hand, Paul is explicit about the sinfulness of homosexual sex acts..On the other hand- he doesn't elevate it above other rebellious sin against god- like gossip or slander or being unmerciful...which many people can be when it comes to this subject.

He lists it as one prime example of the way a mind corrupted by brokenness and sin rejects God and replaces ourselves and desires in the place of god. This is a rebellion, according to Romans- that we have all participated in equally.

My call to you...would be the same as to anyone who has engaged in any sin. Repent...and believe the gospel.

Before we move forward into this last point...I just want to pastorally acknowledge the difficulty of this not for people outside these walls...but for people sitting right here.

This is not an abstract concept. These are friends, brothers, sisters, moms, dads, sons, daughters, grandchildren. These are people we look up to. Not only that, there are people in this room who are attracted to the same sex, that are gay...which, BTW, when I say "gay" that is what I mean. Same Sex Attracted. I would heavily caution you before making absolute statements about the morality of actions...like what weddings you can attend or businesses you can shop at... or what language a person- can use to describe their experiences...be very careful to draw lines that the Scripture doesn't draw.

These are difficult times to navigate. And there are people in this room who are following Jesus, and are same sex attracted...and it is ridiculously unhelpful to lecture them on what words they can call themselves.

Additionally, just like none of us want people mapping their experiences with other Christians or other churches onto us...don't map your experiences with Lesbian and Gay people onto every LGB person. That also is unhelpful. Understand one person at a time...love them, support their walk with Jesus- and that is going to look different in a lot of ways depending on your relationship with them and the situations you find yourself in with that person.

While not exactly the same, think about the way you interact with a person who has given themselves over to greed. It usually doesn't start with "YOU HAVE TAKEN ON GREED AS AN IDENTITY. I REFUSE TO ASSOCIATE WITH YOU BECAUSE YOUR GREED WILL START AFFECTING MY CHILDREN!"

No. Patience, mercy, love, and yes...a call to repentance is necessary. And just like I would never honor a person BECAUSE they are greedy...I would honor a person who has spent a life wrestling with their temptation to make money their God who over and over faithfully is generous.

Likewise, I would not honor a person BECAUSE they are gay. But I will absolutely honor a person who is in a lifelong struggle with Same Sex Attraction but is faithfully stewarding their sexuality to obey Jesus.

TRANSITION: Now- I want to finish with some hope...some beauty.

2) The Corrupt Mind is renewed when it thinks about God's mercy...instead of itself.

Remember- Paul's whole point in giving us all this bad news about how our corrupt minds twist evil into good and then twist entire societies to adopt that idea...his whole point is to get us back to appreciating the gospel.

1:16-17

The power of God to absorb your sin, your guilt, your shame when Jesus died on the cross...is GREATER than any sin you could ever do or dream of doing.

The only thing between you and that power coming into your life...is faith. Will you trust Jesus?

Jesus died for you...he has taken the penalty of death for you.

Jesus rose from the grave...he has defeated the power of sin and death over you.

He has forgiven you. Now he asks you to repent.

Back to 2)

That means to turn around. Even if it doesn't feel good. Even though you know you have to walk away from something that has been in your life for a long time. A behavior that has comforted you. An identity that you have put your hope in. A relationship that has fended off loneliness.

Jesus is calling you to trust him...not just that he saved you and forgives you, but to trust him by walking in his way. Which is the opposite of lust, and greed, and slander and pride and hate. It honors the body he gives us for the purposes he created us. It

doesn't demonize singleness or deify marriage. But holds both in honor in the context of worshipping God with your life.

And maybe you say- "But I don't know. I don't know if I can commit to that kind of life...even though I want to."

I want to show you what Paul writes later in this letter happens to those of us who are constantly keeping in view the mercy of God- to forgive us and restore us by dying for us and rising from the dead.

Romans 12:1-2

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.

2 Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Pray.