

THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

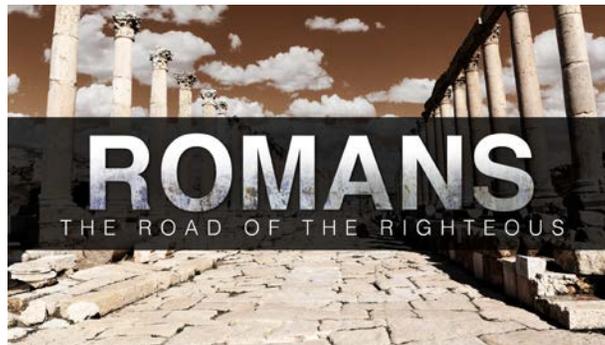
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 1:24-27

Written By

©Pastor Marty Baker

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Sixty-four years ago during the morally wholesome 1950s, Dr. Donald Barnhouse, a premier pastor, scholar, and Bible teacher made this transparent statement:

There are some sermons that a true minister of the gospel loves to preach. There are other sermons which it hurts to preach. I wish that I did not have to include this present chapter. But when one sets out to be an expositor of the Word of God, and takes every verse, every line, every phrase and every word, just as they come, there are moments when the terrible things of God arrive in the narrative, and they must be treated.¹

I could not agree more as a pastor and an expositor. I am under divine mandate to preach the word in and out of season, whether it is favorable or unfavorable (2 Tim. 4:2). I must do this because I know the Bible is the very inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16), and it contains what sinners and saints need to hear so they can either come to know the living God on His terms, or learn how to mold their lives according to His lofty and holy precepts and principles.

Hence, like the prophets of the Old Testament, I know that nothing good or evil is small or trite in the eyes of God. I know God's Word acts like "a polished arrow" (Isa. 49:2) to a godless, carnal, and deceived culture. I know that while the prophet's world seemed serene and enjoyable to the sinful culture, he, based on his love of God and God's truth, reeled from the moral and spiritual confusion and false teaching around him (Jer. 11:18). I know the prophet is, in many respects, an iconoclast who speaks for God against those who worship falsity masquerading a truth (Jer. 7:21-23). I know that the words of Amos are true for any pastor or saint who would dare speak up and out about moral and spiritual darkness masquerading as light. What did he

¹Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Romans*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1954), 270.

say? *“They hate him who reproves in the gate, they abhor him who speaks the truth”* (Amos 5:10). But speak the truth the saint must because he is commissioned by God to do so until He returns. Yes, I do not just know the role of a prophet, but I understand and embrace the forth-telling nature of his divine role and calling. I readily identify with Jeremiah who said, *“If I say, I will not mention Him, or speak anymore in His name, then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it”* (Jer. 20:9). The timeless nature of God’s truth must be spoken if sinners are going to be warned of the consequences of sin and their need of the Savior.

I also identify with Paul who says, *“For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel”* (1 Cor. 9:16). And God’s gospel, as we have seen in Romans 1:16-18, contains good and bad news for sinners. One the one hand, the gospel of Jesus Christ, when embraced by faith, has the raw, divine power which gives a spiritually dead person new life (2 Cor. 5:17), really, eternal life, coupled with the eternal forgiveness of sin (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). On the other hand, the free will rejection of God’s general revelation meets with the wrath of God in the here and now and in the hereafter (Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:33). Paul has told us this much in Romans 1:18-23. God’s wrath against sin and sinners is valid because they naturally resist and outright reject His general and special revelation, opting, instead to worship anything and anyone other than Him.

What happens when people harden their lives against God’s gospel? How does God respond to their wonton disregard for His existence, followed by joyous, and at times, celebratory commitment to living, not for Him, but solely for themselves and their insatiable desires and intricately designed systems of false belief? Paul gives us the candid answer starting in Romans 1:24-27,

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, ²⁷ and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

From verse 24 through 32, Paul drives home the sober, culturally uncomfortable point that to reject God is to be removed from His protection and blessing and to morally and spiritually sink further and further in the quagmire of sin. True, the three-fold use of *“God gave them over”* (παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς) in verses 24, 26, 28 would lead one to think three pedagogical movements are present; however, since verses 26 through 27 are thematically related to verse 24, it is more logical to conclude that verses 28 through 32 contain Paul’s second discussion about what happens when a person choses to reject God and His gospel.

As we anticipate studying these culturally volatile verses, I think it is important to make some opening salient observations. Since our culture believes truth is relative, which, in turn, permits them to change, alter, and modify historical positions on what constitutes morality and purity, it is crucial for us to listen to what Norman Geisler says about the nature of truth. He begins by stating what should be the obvious,

Contrary to what is being taught in many public schools, truth is not relative but absolute. If something is true, it’s true for all people, at all times, in all places. All

truth claims are absolute, narrow, and exclusive. Just think about the claim, “everything is true.” That’s an absolute, narrow, and exclusive claim. It excludes its opposite (i.e., it claims that the statement “everything is not true” is wrong). In fact, all truths exclude their opposites. Even religious truths.²

- Truth is discovered, not invented. It exists independent of anyone’s knowledge of it. (Gravity existed prior to Newton.)
- Truth is transcultural; if something is true, it is true for all people, in all places, at all times ($2+2=4$) for everyone, everywhere, at every time.
- Truth is unchanging even though our beliefs about truth change. (When we began to believe the earth was round instead of flat, the truth about the earth didn’t change, only our belief about the earth changed.)
- Beliefs cannot change a fact, no matter how sincerely they are held. (Someone can sincerely believe the world is flat, but that only makes that person sincerely mistaken.)
- Truth is not affected by the attitude of the one professing it. (An arrogant person does not make the truth he professes false. A humble person does not make the error he professes true.)
- All truths are absolute truths. Even truths that appear to be relative are really absolute.³

To this I would add that truth corresponds to the facts. If a given view, thought, worldview, and/or conclusion defies the facts, then it is, *ipso facto*, false no matter how many people support, push, and/or celebrate it.

In addition, we need to come to terms with the fact that truth is not determined by pragmatism. While truth can be related to what works to a limited degree, it is not without its issues. The late R. C. Sproul puts the inherent problem with this form a measurement in proper perspective when he concludes, “If truth is determined by what works for the individual, then the test for truth ultimately becomes the individual himself.”⁴ When man becomes the measurement of what is true based on whether it works for him nor not, then anything and any lifestyle can be validated . . . and usually is. Why? Because, as Paul will demonstrate in Romans 3, man is spiritually dead and a lover of all which God hates. By nature he lives contrary to God, and seeks to throw off God’s rules and regulations for sound, safe, holy living. By nature, therefore, sinful man will use pragmatism to validate and verify his twisted thinking and life choices. If it works for him to pursue “x,” then the pursuit of “x” is, in his mind, permissible, even though it runs counter to truth, evidence, historical trends, and so forth. And he will tend to fortify his pragmatic pursuit of truth by saying things like, “As long as what I enjoy doing, if it is not hurting anyone why should you care?” If, however, the given activity runs counter to truth, especially natural law or divine law truth, then someone is always being hurt because his life is an open challenge to wise, life-giving laws God has built into the warp and woof of the cosmos we live in.

²Norma L. Geisler, and Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 37.

³Ibid., 37-38.

⁴R. C. Sproul, *Lifeviews: Understanding the Ideas that Shape Society Today* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1986), 85.

With these thoughts of truth in mind, I must draw some logical conclusion as we approach Romans 1:24-32.

- Just because our culture has redefined and codified what constitutes viable sexual relationships does not mean its conclusion is true. Truth has to correspond to facts, be they revelatory or anatomical.
- Just because I know people who engage in activity the Bible condemns as dangerous and deviant (be what it may) does not mean their activity trumps the inexorable, timeless truth of the Bible. Remember, truth is not pragmatic but perpetual. Hence, what the Bible discloses as being God's perfect design for relationships is the design, not a design among many options. Further, anything less than His design is sub-prime.
- Just because a person's moral or sexual life choices results in his feeling marginalized in some unfortunate fashion does not change truth. Remember, truth is the standard of measurement, not man. David's sin with Bathsheba marginalized him until he came clean in confession before God (Psa. 51). He did not attempt to change the view of the nation because he felt marginalized.
- Just because you have struggled with your particular sexual propensity your whole life does not mean it must be true because you were "born with it." Man comes into this world with a rebellious, tweaked sin nature which leads him to choose all sorts of lifestyles which run counter to God (Rom. 3; 5).
- Just because you might feel a given sexual activity might feel natural does not make it so. If it runs counter to the generative and unitive construction of our wonderfully divinely designed bodies, then it is a false desire because it does not correspond to truth. New Testament scholar Luke Johnson evidences this pragmatic, anti-biblical approach when he writes about how he feels about Paul's words in Romans 1:24-26, "I think it is important to state clearly that we do, in fact, reject the straightforward commands of Scripture, and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and god. And what exactly is that authority? We appeal explicitly to the weight of our own experience and the experience thousands of others have witnessed to, which tells us that to claim our own sexual orientation is in fact to accept the way in which God has created us. By so doing, we explicitly reject as well the premises of the scriptural statements condemning homosexuality—namely, that it is a vice freely chosen, a symptom of human corruption, and disobedience of God's created order."⁵
- Just because you have a warm feeling about your given sexual activity which deviates from God's design, a feeling which makes you think God must approve of it, be not deceived. God has clearly designed loving relationships to be held within the confines of marriage between one woman and one man. He does not anywhere in either testament elevate and extol any other type of relationship.
- Just because I do not agree with your sexual choices does not mean I do not love and care about you either. I love you and care enough for you to tell you the truth about where you stand so you can move where there is real life before

⁵Luke Timothy Johnson and Eve Tushnet, "Homosexuality and the Church: Two Views," *Commonweal* (June 15, 2007), 15.

God.

Such are some of the ramifications of truth as they pertain to our misguided culture. As it swiftly and purposefully pulls away from God and God's truth about the gospel and true worship, it does, in fact, replace Him with a flexible, "understanding," tolerant god of one's own making. Let me put it another way. To untie your vessel from the truth of God's existence and the truth of the gospel is to drift helplessly into a current which will lead to Category Five rapids, which, in turn, will terminate at a 1,000-foot waterfall. This is just how God has created our world. When we follow Him and mold our lives to what pleases Him, we find life and blessing . . . and true joy; however, when we reject Him and mold our lives to what pleases us, we find a life of ever-increasing judgment as God evidences true justice. All the while, of course, He lovingly calls out to us to repent and turn to Him so He can forgive us and give us real and enjoyable life.

Those, conversely, who willfully chose to reject God and a law unto themselves, they need to wake up to the fact that . . .

The Rejection of Divine Revelation is Costly (Rom. 1:24-27)

It Leads To Sexual Dishonor, Not Honor (Rom. 1:24-25)

Paul develops this point starting with verse 24:

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. ²⁵ 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 opening inferential particle "therefore" (Διὸ) introduces us to the consequences of rejecting God and His gospel: God gives people over to their inner lusts, which results in impure living and their bodies being dishonored before God because they are using them inappropriately. Let us take this apart piece by piece.

When sinful man rejects God and chooses to worship himself or the creation instead, despite all the evidence he should worship the living God, God does not remain static, but dynamic. He responds by passively and actively giving the person in question over to their sin, be what it may. "To give over," *paradidomi* (παράδιδωμι) is an intensive compound word which can denote a judicial decision, as we see in its New Testament usage. As BAG's Greek lexicon demonstrates:

ⓑ *hand over, turn over, give up* a person ([Lat. *trado*] as a t.t. of police and courts 'hand over into [the] custody [of]' OGI 669, 15; PHib 92, 11; 17; PLille 3, 59 [both pap III B.C.]; PTebt 38, 6 [II B.C.] al.—As Military term 'surrender': Paus. 1, 2, 1; X., Cyr. 5, 1, 28; 5, 4, 51.) *τινά someone* Mt 10:19; 24:10; 27:18; Mk 13:11; Ac 3:13. Pass. Mt 4:12; Mk 1:14; Lk 21:16. *τινά τιμι* Mt 5:25 (fr. one official to another, as UPZ 124, 19f [II B.C.]; TestAbr B 10 p. 115, 11 [Stone p. 78]); 18:34; 27:2; Mk 10:33b; cp. 15:1; Lk 12:58; 20:20; J 18:30, 35; Ac 27:1; 28:16 v.l.; Hs 7:5; 9, 10, 6; Pass. Lk 18:32; J 18:36; Hv 5:3f; m 4, 4, 3; Hs 6, 3, 6b; 9, 11, 2; 9, 13, 9; 9, 20, 4; 9, 21, 4. *τὸν Ἰησοῦν παρέδωκεν τῷ θελήματι αὐτῶν* Lk 23:25. —Esp. of Judas (s. Brown, Death I 211f on tendency of translators to blur the parallelism of Judas' action to the agency of others in the

passion narrative), whose information and action leads to the arrest of Jesus, w. acc. and dat. ἐγὼ ὑμῖν παραδώσω αὐτόν Mt 26:15. Cp. Mk 14:10; Lk 22:4, 6; J 19:11. Pass. Mt 20:18; Mk 10:33a. Without a dat. Mt 10:4; 26:16, 21, 23; Mk 3:19; 14:11, 18; Lk 22:48; J 6:64, 71; 12:4; 13:21. Pass. Mt 26:24; Mk 14:21; Lk 22:22; 1 Cor 11:23b (NRSV et al. render ‘betrayed’, but it is not certain that when Paul refers to ‘handing over’, ‘delivering up’, ‘arresting’ [so clearly Posidon.: 87 Fgm. 36, 50 Jac. παραδοθείς ‘surrendered’] he is even thinking of the action taken against Jesus by Judas much less interpreting it as betrayal; cp. Ac 3:13 παρεδώκατε). ὁ παραδιδούς αὐτόν (παραδιδούς με) *his (my) informer* (on the role of a רִשָּׁמ in Israelite piety s. WVKlassen, Judas ’96, 62–66; but Ac 1:18 the action of Judas as ἀδικία) Mt 26:25, 46, 48; Mk 14:42, 44; Lk 22:21; J 13:11; 18:2, 5. Cp. Mt 27:3, 4; J 21:20.⁶

God’s response to the man worshipping all the wrong things instead of Him, the Creator, is to make a judicial pronouncement: If you want to live contrary to me, then so be it. I turn you over to yourself. Paul taps, of course, into his rabbinical training in the Old Testament here which taught him that God sometimes *actively* works to discipline the people who chose to shake their fist in His face with their lifestyles (Gen. 13:20; Exo. 23:31; Lev. 26:25; 1 Sam. 14:10; 2 Chron. 13:16). At other times, God steps back in merely lets the errant people experience the consequences of walking away from Him. This is certainly the picture of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). Be not deceived, and don’t let your friends deceive you either. To jettison God is to welcome a downward moral and spiritual spiral.

What exactly does God give people over to when they reject Him? Here is Paul’s sobering answer:

God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity (Rom. 1:24).

What does this mean? Again, let’s break it down.

“Lusts” comes from the Greek *epithumia* (ἐπιθυμία). “Desire” can be good or bad, holy or unholy, natural or unnatural. For instance, in 1 Timothy 3:1, Paul says that “if any man aspires to the office of overseer, he desires (*epithumeo*) good work.” Desire, then, in and of itself can be good. However, it can also be bad and evil. When does this occur? When the object is off limits. Take, for instance, what Jesus says in Matthew 5:28,

²⁸but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust (here *epithumeo* is an infinitive denoting purpose or a purposeful look, ἐπιθυμῆσαι) for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart (Matt. 5).

This tells us adultery is not just the act of actually having another person as a sexual partner outside of your spouse, but, in God’s mind it is when you have this driving inner desire for this person. Ostensibly, Jesus just took the seventh commandment prohibiting adultery (Ex. 20:14), and He related it to tenth commandment against coveting (Ex. 20:17) to thereby demonstrate that God condemns not only the sinful action, but the sinful desire, be what it may, as well. This is a

⁶ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 762.

concept our God-rejecting culture willingly fails to grasp: All desire is not good desire, and just because you have a certain desire does not mean it is high and holy. It might just be low and unholy.

Further, when Paul weds “desire” with the word “impurity” he underscores he is talking about sexual deviancy in its various forms. I know this is true because the word “impurity,” *akatharsia*, was used in the ancient world of all sorts of sexual sins. Once more we appeal to BAG:

ἀκαθαρσία, ας, ἡ (Hippocr., Pla. et al.; pap, LXX, En, TestAbr A 17 p. 99, 16 [Stone p. 46]; Test12Patr; Ar. 15, 6; Hippol., Ref. 5, 19, 20; in var. senses of something that is not clean)

① lit. any substance that is filthy or dirty, *refuse* (UPZ 20, 70 [II B.C.]; BGU 1117, 27 [13 B.C.]; POxy 912, 26; 1128, 25 [173 A.D.]) of the contents of graves, causing ceremonial impurity Mt 23:27 (cp. Num 19:13).

② fig. a state of moral corruption (Epict. 4, 11, 5; 8; Pr 6:16; 24:9; Wsd 2:16; 3 Macc 2:17; 1 Esdr 1:40; EpArist 166; En 10:20; Philo, Leg. All. 2, 29) *immorality, vileness* esp. of sexual sins (Vett. Val. p. 2, 19; En 10:11; Ar. 15, 6; Orig., C. Cels. 7, 48, 4) w. *πορνεία* 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Col 3:5; Eph 5:3. Opp. *ἀγιασμός* 1 Th 4:7; Ro 6:19. Of unnatural vices: *παραδιδόναι εἰς ἄ.* give over to vileness Ro 1:24. *δι’ ἀκαθαρσίαν with immoral intent* B 10:8. *εἰς ἐργασίαν ἀκαθαρσίας πάσης to the practice of every kind of immorality* Eph 4:19. Of impure motive (Demosth. 21, 119; BGU 393, 16 [168 A.D.]; Did., Gen. 196, 17) 1 Th 2:3 (w. *πλάνη* and *δόλος*). *ἐν ἄ. τινῶν* B 19:4 is uncertain; prob. *in the presence of impure people*.—DELG s.v. *καθαρός*, M-M. TW.

Don’t get off target here.

Indeed, Paul speaks of lesbianism and homosexuality in verse 26; however, do not think his thoughts about this form of perversion are limited. On the contrary, Paul says in verses 24 through 25 that when man steps away from God, God permits him to be consumed by his insatiable sexual desires (his new god), be what they may, from adultery to pornography to, well, you fill in the blank. When man engages in sexual activity which runs counter to God’s design, the result is the same every time regardless of how good man feels about his choices and activities: he has dishonored his body which was designed a sexual relationship to be held strictly between a man and woman within the confines of marriage. Paul speaks matter-of-factly about this when he offers up an infinitive result clause:

so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

Again, these words are typically lost on our culture. They do not only reject thinking their lifestyle choices are bad and that they should not feel sinful about much of anything, they would never dream their choices and actions based on their inner lusts resulted in defiling anything, let alone themselves. And when they do have inner feelings they have done something wrong, they typically do several things:

- They surround themselves with like-minded people so they can feel normal and acceptable. Interesting. They sense the dishonor so they cover it with false dishonor.
- They surround themselves with like-minded people so they can silence their conscience which convicts them.
- They seek to educate everyone around them that what they are doing, sexually

speaking, is normal and should be acceptable.

- They verbally label those who do not support of their perversion with all sorts of vile, pejorative labels in order to make them feel dishonorable for their moral stance. Can you say, irony?

Far better and wiser to fall at the feet of the living God and embrace the gospel of His Son. When a person does that, real honor and life floods into the person's once vacuous soul. Speaking to the Corinthians who had had their share of sexual perversions living near the godless Acro-Corinthian hill which sported the temple of the sex goddess Aphrodite, Paul exclaimed:

⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6).

There is hope for all those who have dishonored their God-given bodies in ways God did not design them for. He stands ready to forgive, cleanse, and heal the repentant one, and to equip them to overcome their inner lusts which have become their false and overly-demanding god. But He wants you to move first before He moves in with the power of the gospel. Those who chose to continue to reject Him, however, continue to spiral out of control.

What occurs? Paul's answer is explicit in verse 25:

²⁵For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen (Rom. 1).

I find Paul's analysis most intriguing, especially as I survey the American culture. Sex is the god of the land. Our leaders, university officials, teachers, lawyers, film producers, athletes and the like have worked overtime to make sexuality the main topic of everything from the front cover of *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition to the marketing of a bar of soap. Sexuality, in all of its deviant forms, is woven into the fabric of the entire culture, and constantly it is touted to be fine, acceptable, normal, and quite enjoyable when that is a lie, a deception. Who has not walked out of movie, or turned off a DVD movie you rented because of unadvertised and over-the-top sexuality? Paul was right to say that when a person or a culture rejects worship of the living God, he or it logically turns to worship the activity God made to occur between husbands and wives in a covenant relationship before God. Really, with what has and is transpiring in Hollywood over the last six months, how can we not say that sexual perversion is not the god of choice of this misguided, misinformed nation?

The great exchange. This is what we are beholding as our culture willingly walks away from God. They are exchanging the worship of the living God for the worship of a sexual god of their own making, and from what I see there is no limit to what type of activity they will claim is legitimate, nor is there an orientation they will not embrace or support as they do all they can do to elevate the god of their own making. It is, as Paul says, all a lie.

What's the solution? Do we need more sensitivity classes? No. We need God, pure and simple. We need to look at the evidence from general and special revelation all around us and turn away from our sin to Him. Perhaps that revival can start here today with you. If you are a

product of degrading passions, if you worship at the altar of a false god of your making, if you struggle inwardly with inner desires you know are wrong in light of who God is and what He has revealed to us, then I challenge you to stand up and walk away from the false god and fall on your knees before the true God who just does not love you, He stand ready to forgive you and form you into a person who knows how to live a life full of joy, love, and wonder.