

GENERATIONAL TRANSITIONS

Romans 1:28-32

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Presently, Crossroads is in a time of transition in our leadership. Providentially, the Lord has led me in my devotional reading of the Bible to study periods of transition between the kings of Israel. It has been a helpful study for me, because there are lessons worth learning from certain kings' successes and others' failures following these transition times.

Some of the transitions from one king to another were smooth, but most of them were not. As a result of the exchanges of power between kings, the people of Israel were led into periods of communal wickedness, which in turn led to foreign wars and oppression, and ultimately ended in Israel's Babylonian Exile.

One series of transitions that stands out to me is that of the change of kings from King Hezekiah down through his great, great grandsons, the sons of King Josiah. Hezekiah was a great godly king, a faithful worshipper of Yahweh. However, his son Manasseh was a rejecter of Yahweh. He ruled in rebellion to the known Laws of God for most of his fifty-five years as king. He built up altars to foreign gods throughout Israel for the people to worship, and even had pagan altars set up in the Temple that Solomon built! He practiced child sacrifice and sorcery, all things that Yahweh had forbidden the Israelites to do. Manasseh's actions were truly "in your face, Yahweh!"

As a result of his wickedness, God brought the foreign king from Assyria to conquer Israel, and in the battle King Manasseh was captured, bound in chains, and taken to Babylon. While in Babylon, Manasseh humbled himself before Yahweh and sought forgiveness. Yahweh heard him, had the Assyrians release him, and brought him back to Jerusalem to reign. The Bible says in **2 Chronicles 33:13**, "**Then Manasseh knew that Jehovah He was God.**" In other words, Manasseh became a faithful worshipper of Yahweh. The proof of Manasseh's genuine conversion was in his proceeding to take away the foreign gods and altars from the Temple and from all of Jerusalem, but he probably didn't live long enough to accomplish this throughout the rest of Israel.

Unfortunately, Manasseh's earlier God-rejecting life left evil impressions on his successor son, Amon. Before Amon ruled alone, he co-ruled with his father. King Amon did not follow in his father's latter footsteps of worshipping Yahweh, but instead followed after his father's early evil ways, was a rejecter of Yahweh, and promoted idol worship.

However, Manasseh was so transformed by the work of God in his later life, that with his few remaining years he built into his grandson Josiah's life, who succeeded Amon. Like Hezekiah and his grandfather in his later years, Josiah was a faithful worshipper of Yahweh. We don't know how long Manasseh had to build into Josiah's life, because Josiah was only eight years old when he became king. However, his grandfather's later years must have made a great impression on Josiah, because when his father Amon was assassinated after only ruling two years, Josiah had enough spiritual awareness that his first orders were to finish the job that his grandfather had started--destroying all the pagan altars in Israel. Josiah went on to reign for thirty-one years. And of him we read in **2 Kings 23:25**, **"Before him, there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him."**

So far, there are two things that have really struck me about the transitions in this family line of kings. The first was King Manasseh's spiritual turn around. Many of the good kings before him began their reigns being positive spiritual leaders of the nation. But by the end of their lives all of them, with the exception of King David, turned their backs upon God. Only Manasseh began his reign with his back turned against God and later humbled himself before God, was forgiven, and finished his reign on a high note.

I love that, because it reminds me of the truth that no matter how evil our lives have been early on and no matter for how long we have ignored God, when we put our trust in Christ, we are a new creation who can still make a positive impact on the world for Christ with our remaining years, just like Manasseh had done with the nation through his discipleship of his grandson Josiah.

The second great impression that struck me from studying the transitions of Old Testament kings follows what happened after Josiah's godly reign. When Josiah died, he left three sons. They had witnessed their father's godly reign

and passion for seeking the face of Yahweh. Yet all three, ages 18, 23, and 25, totally did not follow in their father's footsteps, but went 180 degrees in the opposite direction. They were rejecters of Yahweh. As a result, their subsequent reigns led to the zenith of disobedience to God, which in turn led to the Babylonian Exile.

As a result of this observation, the question that stirred within me was, "How could these sons ignore the truth and reject Yahweh, when their father had taught them and lived out a godly life before them all of their lives?" The only answer I can come up with is that all people, including those children reared in godly homes and taught the Word of God all their lives, and even fellow Christians can suppress the truth they know about God. And when they do, not only do they suffer, but so does the nation. God's wrath against the nation was His allowance of the destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent Babylonian Exile. It makes me wonder what is in store for our country, which was founded on Judeo-Christian beliefs but has clearly turned its back on God.

Scripture gives us a perfect answer of what we can expect, when we read **Romans 1:18-23**.

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. ²¹For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish

heart was darkened. ²²Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

So, let's highlight thus far just a couple of things these verses remind us of. The wrath of God is revealed to people, because people knowingly suppress the truth about God. They are not ignorant of what they do.

Secondly, they add insult to injury against God when they take the truth they know and exchange it for a lie. Repeatedly in the verses to follow, we are told that people who know the truth suppress the truth and exchange it for a lie. Furthermore, we read of how God reveals His wrath today for all to see. Three times in the verses to follow, Paul explains how, in **verses 24, 26 and 28**. He uses the phrase, "**God gave them over.**" Hence, if we are going to define God's wrath as it is revealed today, we could say it is God's turning us over to the destructive consequences of our own rebellion against Him and the destructive consequences of our suppression of the truth about God.

At this point, we jump back into our study of God's Word, beginning with **Romans 1:28**. But before we do, let's remember the context.

We find ourselves in a major section of the book of **Romans** that gives evidence for God's rightful condemnation of humanity. It has been pronounced against us because of our ongoing suppression of the truth about God and our continual exchanging of that truth of God with lies and futile speculations. This section covers **1:24-3:20**.

In it Paul, like an expert prosecuting attorney, gets very specific about God's rightful condemnation of humanity. He refers to four groups of people that pretty much cover all of us. The first is the Hedonist (**1:24-32**), which Paul mentions first because they lead the parade to the downfall of a nation. This is the group we will finish looking at in a moment. Then next time, we will look at the Self-righteous moralist (**2:1-11**), followed by the Enlightened pagan (**2:12-16**), and finally the Religionist (**2:17-3:8**). In **3:9-20** Paul closes the section with his conclusion that all people, apart from those who have put

their trust in Jesus Christ, stand condemned before God. On their own merit, no one would be able to stand before God to make a successful argument for our perfect and holy God's acceptance of them.

Today, we are in the process of drilling down on the first group, the Hedonist. We said that this section of **verses 24-32** can be broken into four segments. Last time we finished looking at the breakdown of human sexuality. In the next segment, which we will start with this morning in **verse 28**, we learn of the mental breakdown of a hedonist. In **verses 29-31** we will see the overall relational breakdown of the hedonist. People just don't know how to play fair or live at peace with one another. And finally, when the majority of the society becomes hedonistic, we see the communal breakdown of the hedonist in **verse 32**.

Let's finish looking at the final three segments of the breakdown of the hedonist. We read,

²⁸And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, ²⁹being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; ³²and although they know the ordinance 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.

In **verse 28**, we see the mental breakdown of the Hedonist who has turned his/her back on God. The term "**depraved**" refers to something that does not

stand the test. It was commonly used of metals that were rejected by the refiners because of impurities. Hence, they were considered worthless and thus discarded. A depraved mind is not merely something that is in error or foolish, but a depraved mind has a major hard drive problem. It is so depraved that it begins to think that what is bad is actually good and that what is good is actually bad. The function of the conscience breaks down.

Again, this doesn't happen in a vacuum. People are not ignorant of what they are doing. **Verse 28** specifically states, "**They did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer.**" They know what is wrong, and yet they still do it. Living as a God-rejecting hedonist will lead to living life with a depraved mind that operates without a functioning conscience. And as before with the hedonists' sexual breakdown, once again God's wrath is revealed by His giving the hedonist what he wants, even though it leads to disaster. The hedonist can no longer find his or her way through the maze of what is good or bad for them. They cannot form right judgments about life. The hedonist gradually develops a mind characterized continually by depravity, as in the days of Noah: "**Every inclination of the thoughts of [man's] heart was only evil all the time**" (**Genesis 6:5**). Dr. Robert Mounce in his excellent commentary makes this application for today as it concerns our higher schools of education: "Secular education, which rules out of the hand of God in history, is seriously flawed, because it attempts to understand the whole without acknowledging the most significant part." (*The New American Commentary: Romans*)

Secular sociology, without God, brings on blindness in how people can relate with others in a socially acceptable and beneficial manner. Only the work of the Holy Spirit in the "**renewing of the mind**" through the study of God's Word can overcome this deep-seated blindness and perversity that Paul labels "**the depraved mind.**" Just as God "**gave**" them over to a depraved mind, God has given the believer the Holy Spirit through His given Word to transform our minds. But without the Gospel of Jesus, one has no hope of receiving the Holy Spirit to transform one's mind.

Hence, for those without Christ, being mentally broken leads to Hedonism run amuck, as is exemplified in our relationships in **verses 29-31**. We read:

²⁹being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful.

What we have here is a relational breakdown of the Hedonist. If you remember, when we looked at **verse 18**, we said that “**ungodliness**” was the breakdown in the vertical relationship between God and people. When that happens, “**unrighteousness**,” a horizontal breakdown between people, is quick to follow. “**Unrighteousness**” in **Romans** is a term that specifically refers to the breakdown of relationships between people--people treating people wrongly. That’s the description we just read in **verses 29-31**.

This list of sins has no rigid logical arrangement. I have read several commentators who have tried to come up with a breakdown or a grouping of the sins listed here, but none of them quite agree. And the reason they can’t is that the terms listed are not distinct enough in meaning to definitively separate them. Many are synonyms of others and there is considerable overlap between terms.

However, there are three that I want to comment on--the last three. The word “**untrustworthy**” is literally the Greek word for faithlessness, as in someone who does not fulfill commitments and refuses to abide by covenants, contracts, and treaties. It is the only place in the Bible that this term is used. In short, it refers to someone whom you can’t count on.

The term that follows is “**unloving**.” It too is a rarely used term in the New Testament. It would probably be better translated as heartless toward others and their needs.

And then the third term finishes the portrait of a society that has become controlled by depraved minds. It is the term “**unmerciful**,” or better yet, “**ruthless**.” Hence, as a society becomes more hedonistic, it creates people you can’t count on, people who are heartless and ruthless.

Because of these descriptive words, we learn that these actions are not limited to selfish children who don't know how to play well together, but to adults who no longer know how to play civilly together in the same sandbox. This could be a university setting that should allow free speech where both sides are allowed to present their views, a competitive sporting event, or the political platform! Just look at our two political parties as exhibit "A." Democrats can't get along with Republicans or with fellow democrats; and Republicans can't work together with the democrats or each other.

The more our country turns its back on God, the more we find ourselves unable to work together. Mentally, our nation resembles a people of depraved minds, which, in turn, affect the way hedonists relate with others.

Taken as a whole, the terms listed in these verses reflect a spirit of contempt, which is growing in a society for anything that smacks of order or decency. It is a list of mankind's arrogant disregard for other human beings and exploitation of them. Again, it is the ungodliness (vertical relationship with God) that leads to unrighteousness (horizontal relationships with people). And if this is allowed to continue, pretty soon anarchy takes over.

I came across this quote. Tell me if you know who said it: "Our youngsters now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority, and disrespect for older people. Children nowadays are tyrants. They no longer rise when their elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble their food, and tyrannize their teachers." [Pastor's Story File, Nov. 1991, p.2]

Those words almost read like today's newspaper, but they are actually the words of the Greek philosopher Socrates, who lived four hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ and before the Roman Empire was formed. Hence, Rome fell not learning from its predecessor Greece, and apparently we in America haven't learned from either of those two nations' failures.

All of this leads to the final breakdown or collapse of the hedonist. It is the total breakdown communally, in **verse 32**. In this verse that closes down this section on the hedonist, Paul culminates the deterioration of a society with these words. He says, "**And although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death,** [Remember, these

societies and leaders are not ignorant, nor have they forgotten that God exists and that there is a penalty for ignoring Him.] **they not only do the same,** [practice the same defiant behavior] **but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.**” In other words, in the midst of relational chaos, as **verse 31** states, these people are “**without understanding.**” They don’t know how to solve the problems even though they know that they are wrong; yet, amazingly, these who are “**without understanding**” encourage people to continue to reject the truth, which is nothing more than an excellent example of moral insanity.

There’s got to be a better way! So what’s the answer? Why does God give a civilization over to this kind of thing? He does it because when darkness prevails, and despair and violence are widespread, men and women are most ready to come to the light. He gives mankind over to the consequences of their own rebellion so that in their despair they might give themselves to His grace. Isaiah said in **9:2**, “**The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.**”

Notice, will you, that God gives us over, but never does Paul tell us that God turns his back or gives up on us. At least He won’t until we die or this world as we know it comes to an end. God, speaking through the prophet Hosea to the sinful nation of Israel, says in **Hosea 11:8-9**, “**How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim?**” Admah and Zeboiim were two cities along with Sodom and Gomorrah that God had destroyed as a society for arriving at the place of **Romans 1:32**. God continues. He says, “**My heart is turned over within Me; all My compassions are kindled. I will not execute My fierce anger; I will not destroy Ephraim again. For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.**”

If God, at this point, had given up on humanity forever, all would be hopeless. The Lord Jesus Christ would not have come. He would not have died for our sins. There would be no gospel. But that is not the case. Jesus did come. He does transform lives and can transform a society when that group repents and returns to the Lord. The way back to the eternal, sovereign, holy God is still open. That’s the good news, whether it is the way back for a single individual or for a whole society. Christians can still make a difference, if revival begins

in the hearts of the Christians who make up the church. For it is through the church that God plans to reach the lost. But we must get serious about how we choose to live: Holy in our sexuality, Holy in the use of our money, Holy in the way we do business, Holy in the choice of words we speak, Holy in the way we do our work in school (no cheating), and Holy in the way we seek forgiveness and seek to forgive those who we think have treated us unjustly. We must choose to make no room for grudge bearing. For it is our unique set-apart loving of one another that wins us the opportunity to speak truth into the lives of others.

Allow me to read to you what happens when the gospel does take root in a person's life and the effects it can have upon a society when Jesus is truly made Lord. Look at this positive rewriting of **Romans 1:24-32**, created by the late great preacher and pastor, Dr. James Boice:

Therefore, God gave them over in their hearts to self-control and purity, that their bodies might be honored among them. For they kept and cherished the truth of God and worshiped and served the Creator, who is blessed forever, rather than the creature. Amen.

For this reason, God gave them over to pure and wholesome lives, lived with carefree ease even in the most intimate relations so that all received in their own persons the due reward of their fidelity.

And just as they saw fit to acknowledge God in all things, God gave them over to a sound mind, to do those things which are proper, being filled with all righteousness, goodness, generosity, kindness; full of selflessness, life, healing, openness, kindness; they are gentle in speech, always building others up, lovers of God, respectful, humble,

self-effacing inventors of good, obedient to parents, understanding, trustworthy, loving and merciful; and as they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are possessors of life, they do the same and give hearty approval to those who do likewise. [*Romans*, Boice, p. 41]

We began this morning looking at the generational transition of the kings of Israel who had rejected Yahweh and had suppressed the truth about God. And as a result, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed as well as Solomon's Temple. Most of the people who were left alive were taken captive by the Babylonians and placed in exile for seventy years. But the writer of **2 Chronicles** reveals in the following passage that even this exile, orchestrated by God, was a positive time of purification. When the nation repented, the book of **2 Chronicles** concludes on a surprising upswing in a new act of God's grace declared through a pagan king, Cyrus, to whom God had made Himself known. We read this in **36:22-23**:

²²Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia—in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah—the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, ²³“Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!’”

For the Jews who had repented and wanted to return home to worship Yahweh and to restore their homeland, God made a way in that generation to turn their nation around. Likewise, God can do that for us, if we individual believers commit together to turn our hearts toward the Lord and to live holy lives as ambassadors of Jesus Christ, ready to share the good news of Jesus to all who will listen.

In short, God's grace brings freedom from bondage, light from darkness, life from death.

Let's pray. Keep in mind that the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Roman church. That is, he wrote these words to Christians like us, that we might learn and take notice of our own lives and know that if it were not for our savior Jesus, we would have no hope against God's wrath. So, I ask you as my brothers and sisters in Christ, as we have been reading these verses, has the Holy Spirit been speaking to you about any area of your life that you have been resisting change or an area that you have let go? Do you need to sacrificially give of yourself to another? Are you bearing a grudge that is keeping you from being the child, the parent, the Christian you really desire to be? Is there an activity that has taken preeminence in your life and needs to be put aside or given less priority so that you can give more attention to the Lord's calling upon your time. Don't ignore the gentle convicting voice of the Holy Spirit. Listen and submit to His correction, and you will find life.

Then, to you who see the problem, sense that you may be a part of it, don't know Jesus personally and intimately, and don't want to experience anymore of the downward spiral in your life, Paul wrote the answer to your problem few chapters after this: Turn to Jesus. Entrust your life to the Savior as the only one who can forgive your suppressing of the truth and living in opposition to what the Lord says is right. Turn to Jesus and ask Him to forgive you and to begin His transforming work in your life.

We submit ourselves completely to you Lord Jesus. We want to follow your direction as spelled out in your Word.