

THE MORAL DECAY OF AMERICA

Romans 1:24-25

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Recently, I have become privy to some early figures of an in-depth research project that is looking at the present and future impact of the church in America. I'm not at liberty to share many of the figures or the early findings until the project is finished and published. But I can share with you a few of these. During the great revivals of the Methodists and Baptists here in the US during the 1800s, there were more than 3,000 church plants taking place every year in America, with virtually no church closures. The population at the time was 5,300,000. The reason we highlight the Methodists and Baptists is that they were the only ones who kept records back then. Today we have 4,000 total new church plants taking place every year, but in comparison to the increased population, that number of church plants per capita has actually dropped in number. The other shocking statistic is that we are closing down 3,700 churches every year, leaving us with a net total of 300 church plants a year. The population in 2010 was 309,300,000.

- So, with hundreds of millions of fewer people in the 1800s, there were 2,700 more church plants per year than today.
- If the current upward trend of church closures continues, along with the downward trend of church plants, closures will soon overcome plants.
- This means that the church is losing ground, and that the church is no longer impacting our country as it once was.

Because of these figures, the research group is trying to find the answers to the questions: "Why is the church no longer impacting America?" And, "What steps can be taken to assist the church to positively engage this country with the Gospel?"

This project is estimated to take two to three years to be completed and published. Hopefully, seminaries and church leaders will look closely at the findings and the recommendations to rethink our strategy for reaching people for Christ in our country, and thus positively impact the future of our country.

At present, there have already surfaced several initial factors for why the church is no longer impacting our country. One is the loss of the Christian voice being given a legitimate chance to be heard in our schools of higher education.

But there is another, even more basic factor that has been at work in our country since post WWII that has literally exploded in the last thirty years, and that is the subject that we are going to begin looking at this morning in our ongoing study of **Romans 1**.

One of the lessons we have learned from history is that we often don't learn lessons from history. However, as we consider our present plight in America, I want to remind you of the historical findings from the classic work, published in 1789, called *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon. In his work, Gibbon explained what brought about the decline of the great Roman Empire, which was one of the most powerful empires in history. To my knowledge, no one has written a follow up work on this subject to refute any of his findings. Instead, ongoing historical research of other civilizations has revealed that what was true of the causes for the fall of the Roman Empire have also been true of the fall of every great nation before and since.

The following are Edward Gibbon's five reasons for Rome's fall.

1. The rapid increase of divorce; the undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home, which is the basis of human society.
2. Higher and higher taxes and the spending of public monies.
3. The mad craze for pleasure; sports becoming every year more exciting and more brutal.
4. The building of gigantic armaments, when the real enemy was within--the decadence of the people.
5. The decay of religion--fading into mere form, losing touch with life and becoming impotent to warn and guide the people. [*Preacher's Illustration Service*, vol. 1, no. 3, April, 1988, p.3]

Of these five findings, I believe that **Romans 1** supports the fifth as being a root issue for the fall of the Roman Empire as well as the cause for the failings of our own country.

What made America great as a nation was not its “great experiment” with democracy or its global military power, but the strong foundation of Christian morals upon which this country was built. The predominant spiritual influencer at the birth of our nation was what we would call the Bible believing, evangelical church. Christians were responsible for the founding of universities, libraries, and hospitals.

I believe that as a church today, if we take what God says seriously in **Romans** and begin to act accordingly in living out the gospel and getting serious and intentional about evangelism, we can once again impact our country for good.

As you open your Bibles to **Romans 1**, I want to remind you of what we have discovered thus far in verses **17-23**. There the Apostle Paul contrasts two revealed plans of God. The first is a productive plan to redeem those people who want to have a relationship with the living God. Paul called this plan “**the righteousness of God revealed**” in **verse 17**. It is God’s plan of redemption through the gospel of Jesus Christ. As has been clearly stated already in **verse 16**, the gospel is the only power to save and transform the broken lives and hearts of people.

The second plan of God is a destructive one. Paul mentions it in **verse 18** and goes on to more fully explain it in the following verses. God’s destructive plan is called “**the wrath of God revealed.**” This plan describes how God will handle those who reject Him. His plan ultimately leads to the eternal damnation of all who turn their backs on God.

In the following two and a half chapters of **Romans**, Paul presents his case that all human beings are doomed to this second plan unless, while they are alive, they choose to take advantage of God’s plan of redemption by putting their confidence in the finished work of Christ. In **chapters 3-8**, Paul explains how and why God’s plan of redemption works.

In our study of **Romans 1:18-23**, we learned that God justifiably has revealed His wrath against all humanity. All humans are guilty of having suppressed the truth about God, including Christians. We mentioned that the word “**truth**” as it is used in the New Testament is not simply something to which one must give mental assent; truth is something to be done, to be obeyed, or to be put into practice. To believe the truth is to know and obey and apply the truth.

When people, including Christians, act sinfully, ignore the truth, and rebel against God’s rule, they are suppressing the truth. Any time Christians misrepresent God either by living an unbiblical lifestyle, by encouraging others to do so, or by characterizing God in a manner that portrays Him to be anything less than who He really is, we are perverting and suppressing the truth. The only difference between the outcome of the Christian who suppresses the truth and the non-Christian who suppresses the truth is that, due to God’s mercy, Christians escape the wrath of God which leads to eternal damnation. However, we don’t escape his loving discipline, which is meant to correct and thus transform our lives.

But how is God’s wrath revealed against ungodliness and unrighteousness? In **verses 21-22**, Paul answers this with his broad sweeping statement that the ungodly mind of unbelievers becomes “**darkened**” in their thinking. Mankind apart from God may profess to be wise, but in actuality, we demonstrate that we are absolute fools.

Something I don’t believe I mentioned last time about God’s wrath being “**revealed**” is that this is an expression that describes not just a manifestation of a past historical reality, but a present ongoing reality that is now being manifested. That may surprise some of you, because when you hear of God’s wrath, you may think of things like floods, tornados, hail, fire, and brimstone. Sometimes God does express his wrath in those methods, but that is not his normal pattern of revealing His wrath. Paul will demonstrate God’s normal manner of revealing His wrath today in the verses that follow **verse 23**. We will see that God’s wrath is a slow growing anger with specific and justifiable reasons for that anger.

Verse 23 finishes Paul’s introduction to God’s wrath with the statement that our suppression of truth leads to adoration and worship of the wrong things,

which is idolatry. The very next word in **verse 24**, “**therefore**,” introduces the next major segment of this letter, which not only describes the evidence of ongoing suppression of truth by God’s created human beings, but also goes on to prove that no one is without blame for having suppressed the truth and all are deserving of being eternally rejected by God.

In **Romans 1:24-3:20**, Paul gets very specific about God’s rightful condemnation of humanity. In this section, Paul speaks to four groups of people: The first is the HEDONIST (**1:24-32**). Paul mentions the hedonist first because this is the group that leads the parade to the downfall of a nation. This is the group we will begin looking at in a moment. Then we have 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 concludes this section stating that all people, apart from those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ, stand condemned before God. Based on our own merit, not one of us will be able to stand before God and make a successful argument for the perfect and holy God’s acceptance of them.

This morning, we begin our study of the HEDONIST. A hedonist is one who has turned his back on God to worship or seek after personal pleasure at the expense of all else. The hedonist motto is, “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we will die!” In **verses 24-32**, Paul illustrates how God-ignoring, foolish mankind suppresses the truth about God in their lifestyles. In these verses, I see a four-part breakdown of human life that is the result of hedonism. The first manifestation of hedonism to be mentioned in this section is found in **verses 24-27** and is the driving factor, the billboard, which represents a society that has been engulfed by hedonism. It is the breakdown of human sexuality. Then in **verse 28**, we learn of the mental breakdown of a hedonist. In **verses 29-31**, we 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**.

This morning, we will limit our study to looking at just **verses 24-25**. We see here the first observable and obvious major step in a society which has suppressed the truth about God. This obvious indicator is that the society

becomes obsessed with sex, while becoming less satisfied with the sex they are having. There is a human sexual breakdown.

As we read these two verses, keep in mind the historical backdrop to this letter. Paul wrote this letter from the city of Corinth around AD 59. At that time, Corinth was one of the most sexually aberrant cities in Greece. Displays of this could be witnessed on the street corners, in their art galleries, in their schools, and in their pagan temples. For Paul and for those in Rome, an equally sexually (so called) liberated city, these were not things that were about to happen in their community, but things that were already openly accepted and practiced. And I believe that just like Christians who come to Christ as adults today, the pagan Christians brought with them their sexual bondage, and it was not something that quickly fell away from their lifestyles. It was an area of their lives which, over time, Christ transformed.

So when Paul's readers first read these words, what do you think was their reaction? I believe it will be the very same as ours. Follow along in your Bibles as I read these words: **“Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.”** Notice, their sin began first in their unbridled passions of their hearts and quickly moved into illicit sexual acts. This reminds me of that foundational principle found in **Proverbs 4:23**, which says, **“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”** It is only as our hearts are healed and made known in Christ that our lifestyles change.

I believe that within this context, this expression, **“impurity”** refers to the stirring up of wrongful sexual desires of any kind between a man and a woman, *outside of marriage*. This is heterosexual sin. In the next two verses, **26-27**, Paul moves away from what is the natural heterosexual relationship to speak to what God says is **“unnatural,”** something not of God, homosexual sin. We will look at that next week. But here, **“impurity”** refers to heterosexual acts outside of marriage such as multiple one-night stands, wife-swapping, and group sex parties. But because this sin begins in the heart, it would also include sexual fantasies and viewing pornography.

Paul continues, **“For they exchanged the truth of God** [In this context that would be the truth of God concerning sexual relations being reserved for a man and woman within marriage.] **for a lie** [“You can ignore God's

instructions concerning saving sexual relations until marriage, because you are engaged or because you hope to get married or you think you are married without making a public declaration of your commitment to one another in your community. And what is the driving force people exchanging the lie for the truth?] **and worshiped and served the creature** [meaning the human bodies of those of the opposite sex] **rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.**

There is a key expression used in **verse 24** that is repeated two more times in **verses 26** and **28**. It is the expression, **“God gave them over.”** This expression describes how God’s wrath is being manifested today and down through history. When we exchange the truth of God for lie and practice sin, God gives us over, which refers to a judicial abandonment of the human race to the consequences of its rebellion against the known truth of God. In other words, God has allowed sexual perversion to continue, not because it was right, but because He knew that in the end, it would lead us to a dead end of unhappiness and emptiness, which in turn would either turn some of us back to God for answers or, if unrepenting of sin, would be grounds for rejection by God.

When I began this morning, I mentioned a study being done on why the church has lost its ability to impact its culture. One of the major reasons that has surfaced has been that Christians have lost their voice in the scholastic world. But another reason I believe that the church has lost its power to impact our country is the sexual addiction of men and women. They are enslaved, entrapped, and are so filled with shame that they have no confidence in sharing their faith.

Due to the relatively recent availability and secrecy of free porn on smart phones, tablets, and computers, the sexual bondage of men and women trapped in viewing pornography has become broad within the evangelical church, so that we are now raising a generation of sex addicts.

A recent study of the evangelical church found that 60-70% of men in churches across all denominations are in sexual bondage, including 76% of young male adults between the ages of 18-24. Sexual addiction or bondage is defined by viewing pornography or being in a sexually illicit relationship once a month. 50% of pastors are caught up in pornography. 50 % of teen

boys 15-17 years are entrapped. And it is not just men. Years ago, this statistic was unheard of, but today, 20-30% of women in the church are addicted to porn. 40 million adults visit porn sites monthly.

Just last week I was informed that in 2016, an independent study was done in a Southern Oregon school district, which had put monies aside to gift all high school students with an iPad. This study was based on just one anonymous survey of an Evangelical church. The study found that 76% of the Christian boys in this one church used their iPad to view pornographic websites. 54% of the Christian girls viewed these websites as well.

Men and women, everything within me wants to believe that these statistics aren't true for Calvary Crossroads--maybe some other church, but not ours. But I know this isn't so. Twenty years ago, I might have had one man a year come in for counseling because he was struggling with pornography. Now it seems like it is almost a weekly occurrence, not all from our church, but many are. Too many.

We have in our church family followers of Jesus from both sexes and all ages and levels of spiritual growth looking for a way to slay this dragon in their lives.

The enemy is robbing the church of being the moral authority, of being the moral strength in our country, because Christian men and women are enslaved to porn and love attractions.

I believe that because men, in particular, are bound up by their shame in this area, they have no spiritual desire, confidence, or authority to stand up for the gospel. As the leaders in their homes, their church, and their community, the enemy has cut off our men from being men of influence, all due to sexual bondage.

When did the church begin to slow down in the number of new church plants per year? Statistically, it took place just after WWII. Interestingly, something else took place at that same time in our country. Up to WWII, we were basically a Judeo-Christian nation. Within two decades, our country went from being a shining light on a hill to being the largest exporter of sexual pornography to the rest of the world.

How did we slide into such moral decay so quickly? According to Dr. Judith Reisman, a world historian in the destruction of human sexuality, the steep downward slide into our country's wide moral decay all began with Dr. Alfred Kinsey's report on human sexuality in 1948, which has since been proven to be a travesty to the scientific method and filled with lies about human sexuality that exchanged the truth about God for a lie. Dr. Kinsey's fraudulent reports became the foundation of all the sexual education being promoted in our high schools and universities to this day! His handprints are on our modern abortion laws, sodomy laws, homosexuality laws, and the philosophy of the lesbian and gay movement. Ultimately, his now proven to be fraudulent data led to the legalization of pornography in this country. One of the virgins in college who read Kinsey's reports was a young man, Hugh Hefner, the founder of the Playboy empire, who became the chief huckster and promoter of Kinsey's lies.

As Darwin became the father of modern evolution, Kinsey became the father of the modern sexual revolution.

So what are we going to do as a local church family to turn the tide of revival in our church and our community? Are we going to continue to ignore this crisis and hope it goes away? It isn't going away. We have two choices: do nothing about it, or go to war! The elders have chosen to go to war!

Now is the time for us to learn to show others the way to sexual freedom, so that men and women can become powerful ambassadors of the gospel and save marriages and build strong families.

Knowing this, the elders have researched a five-week DVD series called *The Conquer Series: The Battle Plan For Purity*. We are going to be offering this to men beginning June 19 at 6:30PM and beginning July 1 at 8:43AM. We want all you men, high school age and above, to sign up and show up for this study.

Come expecting to find a solution. I don't care if you are in the 35% of men who aren't in bondage to pornography. I praise God for your being in that group. But this is every man's battle. This is your battle as well. Even if

you are in the 35%, it doesn't mean you don't have temptations. There may be snow on the roof, but there's fire down below. This is every man's battle!

Furthermore men, you have friends, sons, grandsons, and parents in this room who are secretly struggling, crying out to God for help. They are desperate. They need you. Come and be prepared to help your brother. They need your understanding, your help, and your partnership to enable them to find freedom from the shame of being entrapped in pornography. They need for you to show them the way to freedom in Christ from pornography. I'm asking Victor, Cody, Dan, our elders, deacons, and Bible study leaders to participate. We want this study to be a safe place for all men to attend. No pointing of fingers. No condemnation. Just understanding, help, partnership, and guides to victory.

Good men are being ensnared and are controlled by guilt, self-hatred, and an overwhelming sense of failure. The reality is this: Once one occasion for moral failure has taken place, it can soon lead a man to be overtaken by enslavement. Simply telling ourselves or being told to "Just stop it!" will not suffice. We need a Biblical strategy and a way to renew our hearts, minds and wills in order to change. Men, you need a team of accountability partners plus the power of the Holy Spirit to win this battle. You will never win this battle alone.

Normally, the workbook that accompanies the series cost \$15 dollars. But for the first forty men who sign up, it will be free. You can sign up by putting your name on your contact card and put it in the offering. If you don't have a contact card, call the office. I'm going to guess we have one hundred men in this church, and I would like to see one hundred fifty show up, because you brought another man with you! This is for five weeks and lasts ninety minutes a week.

If our country and our church are going to be impacted by our lives, we need men, holy men, sold out to living free from this bondage so as to effectively lead their homes, Jesus' church, and our community, now and in the future.

Ladies, we realize that this is not only a problem for men. I have recently found out that the same organization that has produced the Conquer series

has just put out a similar series for women. When we have previewed it and find that it is helpful like the men's series, we will let you know.

Also, for you ladies who have boyfriends, sons, husbands, and fathers who have let you down because of their addiction to porn, we want you to know that we have a women's study all set up for you. It's called *Betrayal and Beyond*. This is to help you and to help you help your husband or son or father find freedom. If you don't understand why a simple "Just stop this!" won't work with this enslavement, you really need to take in the information from this study. It will really help you to understand the depth of this struggle for any man. And it will give you confidence that this war can be won. The study will begin on June 15 at 6:30. If you would like to attend, please sign up. Your workbooks cost a little more, but there is partial help from Women's Ministries if you need it.

One final word to you wives, mothers, grandmothers, and girlfriends. Ladies, I'm asking you to join me in my quest to see our men step up to become the men of courage, purity, and honor that God intends them to be. Here's your part: If your man is a good-willed man but is caught up in this, he must believe that seeking help will not cost him everything. This is crucial, because the fact is, if he doesn't seek help, it will cost him and your family everything. If he should decide to go, quietly encourage him to do so.

I'm asking you to do three things: Pray for the men of our church and your man every day if you can remember to do so, until we finish this five week series, and beyond if you are so inclined.

Suppress the urge to ask your man, "Why are you going to that meeting?" Just refrain from that. The first key step to a man's victory in this area is to know he will not be chastised, shamed, or rejected if he attends this series. If there is any fear of these reactions coming to him from his woman, he most assuredly will stay away, which will sentence him to hopelessness. So I'm asking you, should your man choose to come, please refrain from asking him why.

Finally, don't pry into his life on this matter right now. And I'll tell you why. In this program, we are going to tell the men, "Do not tell your woman what you have committed to do or vowed to do or what changes you are

planning to make until you have experienced at least six consecutive months in which you have been able to live without failure.” Ladies, that could mean that he won’t say anything to you for quite a while. Remember, this is not a skirmish or a mere battle. This is going to be a war for him.

I have sent out a personal letter by snail mail to every man and woman listed in our church directory, just in case they weren’t able to be here this morning. You should be receiving it this week. If you are new to our church and are not in our directory, then please give us your mailing information and we will get you that letter. If you want to take that letter to a friend to invite them to join you in one of these studies, please feel free to have them sign up with you.

