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Romans

Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. Romans 1:27

Again as in 1:26, Paul uses a word for “men” which indicates “males.” What he will speak of concerns acts of debauchery and perversion in which “males” go against the natural order. What is normal and right with “man” is excluded in his thoughts here. “Likewise” is speaking about what he stated concerning the “females” in verse 26 and he will now apply that same logic to the “males.”

These “males” whose mental state has fallen to the basest form of depravity leave “the natural use of the woman.” Neither a rocket scientist nor a specialist in anatomy is needed to determine what the different sexual organs of the male and female are meant for. Like the knowledge of God, it is self-evident. It is the deviant who shuns this knowledge and goes about using their parts in an inappropriate manner.

Not only do they act out their abnormal thoughts, but they actually burn “in their lust for one another.” The verb translated as “burned” is the Greek word *exekauthesin*. This is the only time it is used in the Bible and it is in a way (aorist indicative passive) that indicates these people “were set ablaze” in their passions. What we have seen is the morally depraved downward spiral as men reject God. When He is completely turned away from, there is nothing left but a total

consuming of the individual in a mental state which is acted out in that which is contrary to nature.

Paul describes this mental/physical state as “men with men.” Like the females in verse 26, these males have committed the ultimate act of what is shameful and yet because they have departed so far from normal and right thinking they continue on in their vile actions. Paul says that because of this they receive “in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.” This penalty comes because “God gave them up” to their vile passions.” (v. 26) This is what one would term “judicial abandonment.” Instead of active prosecution of the sin, God in essence removes Himself from the equation and allows nature to take its course.

If what is natural and ordained by God leads to life, then what is unnatural and opposed to Him will lead to death. Diseases such as AIDS are the inevitable result of such perversion. Throughout history, when homosexuality becomes prevalent in a society, the incidents of plagues targeted at the offenders arise. Venereal diseases mutate as the unnatural habits spread and very quickly they take over the entire population. Along with these obvious signs are those which need to be seen from a wider angle – mental problems, shortened life spans, societal conflicts, etc all result from the entry and acceptance of homosexuality into a culture. These are “the penalty of the error which was due.”

The most egregious part of what occurs though is the purposeful blaming of God for their penalty – as if He was mean or capricious. Rather, they are getting what they deserve by acting in a manner contrary to normalcy. Thus even their concept of right and wrong about their judgment is convoluted.

Life application: How many times do we see people, even within the Christian community, who blame God for adversity? However, the opposite is usually not the case. Life, food, friends, income, etc. are looked as a deserved, and thanks aren't forthcoming. Let us be quick to be thankful to God for every good blessing and slow to blame or show anger when adversity comes.

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;... Romans 1:28

In this verse, Paul shows that the responsibility for what has occurred lies solely with the wickedness of man and his rejection of God. "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge..." is referring back to man's unwillingness to give God thanks or praise (verse 20-23). Because of this rejection, these things came about. The word "like" is the Greek *edokimasan* which means "to put to the test." In their minds, they put God to the test of their own moral compass and found that they wanted to do things without Him. Because of this, "God gave them over to a debased mind."

As a result of this, He then hands them over to their own wicked devices. The word for "debased" is the word *adokimon* – failing to pass the test. It is a different form of the same word mentioned above. They put God to the test and chose what they wanted rather than Him and so He gave them over to a failing of His test. Their moral perversion, which they willingly chose, has led to their mental perversion, which is the result of what they chose. The penalty they received for their ungodliness is a penal infliction of judgment necessitated by His holiness.

The debased mind they have brought upon themselves results in doing "those things which are not fitting." As we have seen, this corrupt attitude leads to "the penalty of their error." Nature, which God created, actively works to eliminate what is unnatural through disease and death. This shows the righteousness and judgment of God in and through creation. If what He creates works in this way, then how much more sure will be His hand of judgment when we as humans stand before Him?

Life application: Death entered the world through sin. Jesus came to take our place and grant us new life apart from sin. By faith in Him we are freed from its penalty forever. Though this isn't yet realized, it is the glorious hope that we as believers have. Because of this hope, let us strive to live holy lives now, to His honor and glory.

...being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers,... Romans 1:29

This verse is continuing on with those that God gave over to a debased mind that now “do those things which are not fitting.” Forthcoming from Paul’s hand is a list of 23 of these things and they fit people of every stratum of society and from the most backward of people groups to the most economic and socially elite in the world. Some people may be filled with many in the list and some with just a few or only one, but the depravity of the human heart finds its release somewhere in this list in fallen man.

Considering that man was made in God’s image and with the intent and purpose of bringing Him glory, this list is a scathing indictment on us. The first is “all unrighteousness.” This is a broad brushstroke of those who are in Adam and it speaks of every angle from which sin can attack – the thoughts, the words, the actions, the inactions, the motivations, etc. This thought covers these both outwardly toward others and inwardly toward self. The man who was created to be spiritually connected to God is carnal and unspiritual.

The next in the list has been covered in the preceding verses – “sexual immorality.” This is any sexual thought, action, or contact which occurs outside of the bonds of a marriage between a man and a woman. God presented Eve to Adam and thus the pattern was established at the beginning. The Law of Moses, the arrival of Jesus, and the introduction of the Church Age all confirm the original intent and pattern. Sexual sins are personal and intimate and therefore they require one to be in tune with God’s intent at all times lest they take over the unsuspecting or unprepared.

Next on the list is “wickedness.” This word speaks of intentional harm against others. A good word to understand this would be malice. John Calvin states, “It is that depravity and obliquity of mind which strives to produce injury on others.”

From wickedness we move to “covetousness.” Coveting is the last of the Ten Commandments and so is it isn’t perceived “as bad” as other sins. But this is the opposite of the truth. Coveting leads to the committing of the other sins. When one covets something else, they take their eyes off God and replace Him with that thing – thus breaking the first commandment. Coveting another man’s wife leads to adultery, thus breaking the seventh commandment, etc. We need to be thankful for what we do have and fix our eyes on Jesus, not on the things we don’t possess.

“Maliciousness” is next and indicates ill will which is fundamentally vicious in nature. One may consider a soul longing for revenge and filled with extreme bitterness in this category.

Another of the list is being “full of envy.” Webster describes it this way “Pain, uneasiness, mortification, or discontent, excited by another’s prosperity, accompanied with some degree of hatred or malignity, and often with a desire or an effort to depreciate the person, and with pleasure in seeing him depressed.” The soul filled with envy is bitter indeed and will go to great lengths to injure another simply because someone else has received something they feel they deserve and which the other didn’t deserve.

“Murder” is in the list and is also the sixth commandment. Murder does not include the lawful taking of a life for a capital crime; the taking of a life in self-defense; or the taking of life in legitimate battle. The Bible is perfectly clear on these issues. What it does speak of is the intentional taking of another human life apart from these exceptions. Man was created in God’s image and therefore to willfully take another life is an attack against God’s image bearer. This includes the crime of abortion. When a society devalues human life, either by authorizing the murder of others, including the unborn, or by withholding the execution of capital crimes, that society becomes implicitly guilty in the blood that was shed.

“Strife” can be summed as conflicting with others about words more than things. It is seeking glory and victory in speech and conflict rather than for the truth. This sin has become so commonplace since the introduction of the internet that it is

everywhere at all times. Social media has given everyone the ability to attempt to seem authoritative on a matter whether they know what they are talking about or not. People strive for the sake of strife.

“Deceit” is engaging in deception. People engage in “philosophy and empty deceit” as Paul says in Colossians 2:8 and thus make boastful pretense to their own morality even though they are often the basest of beings.

The next on the list are those filled with “evil-mindedness.” This is the mental state of someone who is filled with Satan and not by God. They abound in wickedness. It is an insatiable mental state which consumes every thought and then is displayed in every action. Because of this the inevitable result is that “they are whisperers.” Gossip, whether of truthful things or untruthful things, has the main intent of conquering and dividing. The evil-minded don’t have felicity and peace on their mind, but rather conflict and hatred. They sow the seeds of these things with their whisperings.

The list will continue as Paul describes the state of the human soul who is at enmity with their Creator. Only through the new birth which comes by calling on Jesus can this state be terminated in a person. This doesn’t mean it will happen all at once, or even in this life, but that through His work we can be free of these things and thus work to please God until the day He glorifies us.

Life application: Take time to reread the list of today’s sins and think about where you can improve your own life and actions concerning any of them which still arise in you.