

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO IMMORALITY?

(Romans 1:24-32)

INTRODUCTION:

The concept of sin seems to be fading from our vocabulary today. A few years back someone wrote a book with the title, “Whatever happened to sin?” The idea is that in today’s world we call **sinful** behavior by psychological terms and avoid labeling some as sin because of political correctness. Therefore we don’t talk about sin. We could even ask, “Whatever happened to immorality?” We don’t even want to call anything immoral anymore. It is just personal preferences, lifestyle choices, etc.

Why is this? Why has the concept of sin and immorality faded in our understanding of the human situation? I believe that Romans 1:18-32 tells us why. In God’s assessment of the moral decline of humanity the final stage is boasting in those who practice immoral acts. Verse 32 is the conclusion of the section on the human condition from a moral viewpoint. Let me read verse 32 again:

32 who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

Paul’s argument from verses 18 to 32 is that God has revealed Himself to mankind but mankind has rejected God and suppressed the truth in ungodliness and unrighteousness. In verses 19-23 he describes what it means to be ungodly. Ungodliness is rejecting the true God and worshipping a god of our own making, i.e. practicing some form an **idolatry**. Mankind has gone from knowing the true God to worshipping man, birds, beasts, and even reptiles.

(Rom 1:22-23 NKJV) Professing to be wise, they became fools, {23} and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man; and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

There is has not been a evolutionary development of religious understanding in the history of man – from polytheism to monotheism. There has been a **devolution** in religion. You see at creation monotheism was the only religion. Everyone knew the true God. Everyone called upon the one and only God. Even Cain knew God. As mankind got further away from God polytheism< belief in many gods, became the dominate religion. There were the Greek and the

Roman pantheons. Then there was fetishism, the worship of creatures and hand-made idols. Today, man in his human thinking talks about the evolution of religion starting from fetishism and working its way up to polytheism and then to monotheism. But the opposite is the case.

The longer man refused to have God in his thoughts, the more idolatrous and grotesque he became in his worship.

If the ungodliness is seen ultimately in idolatry, what is unrighteousness displayed as? This is the thrust of verses 24 through 23.

GOD GIVES US OVER TO OUR UNRIGHTEOUSNESS

Verses 24-32 speaks of the downward spiral of unrighteousness to boasting in others who practice unrighteousness. Before we get into the downward spiral of unrighteousness we need to notice a principle that is repeated in these verses. The principle is God's response to man's rejection of his revelation. His response is that He withdraws his restraint on sin. God gives man over to his unrighteousness.

Three times the phrase 'God gave them up or over to...' is used here.

24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness,

26 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions.

28 God gave them over to a debased mind,

"Moral uncleanness, vile passions, and a debased mind" are the retribution assigned by God to those who refuse to have God in their thoughts." God's retribution or just punishment for the religious sin of turning from Him is allow the immorality of man to be more and more in **control** of this world.

The first mention of the word 'sin' in the Bible is in Genesis 4 in the account of Cain and Abel. In verse 7 God uses the word 'sin' with Cain.

"If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

As God told Cain, "Its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." Sin will control us and like a ferocious beast seeks to destroy us. Only God can

provide the power to control sin in our lives. When we reject Him, then all we have left is our own devices and they will fail us.

God allows us to reap what we sow. **“Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows that shall he also reap.”** If a person is bent on allowing unrighteousness to control them and refuses to submit to God, then God will give us over to it. This is on an individual level and on a national level.

WHAT IS UNRIGHTEOUSNESS?

How is unrighteousness displayed as a result of rejecting God? There are three groupings of activities in this section.

In verses 24-25 it is “to dishonor their bodies among themselves.”

In verses 26-27 it is the sin of homosexuality and lesbianism.

In verses 28-31 it is a list of 22 specific sins against God and humanity.

I am not sure what is in mind in the sin of “dishonoring their bodies among themselves.” It may be the inordinate focus on bodily passions and lusts to the point of disfiguring themselves.

We have heard on the news this past week of a married couple who was in ‘sexual bondage.’ The wife tied up the husband in a way that he died. All because of a ‘sexual game.’ I would say that this is an example of dishonoring their bodies.

THE SIN OF HOMOSEXUALISM

One obvious sin of rejecting God’s authority in our life is the sin of **homosexuality.** The homosexual lifestyle is one of the hot button issues today in our society. Is this a lifestyle which should be accepted as “normal”? Should society allow same-sex marriages?

There are all kinds of argumentation on both sides, but what does the Word of God say? It is clear to me that the Bible condemns homosexual activities, just as it condemns all sexual activity outside of marriage. The Bible condemns adultery and all heterosexual activity outside of the marriage relationship as strongly as it condemns homosexual activity. Sin is sin. One of the problems today is not that homosexual activity is stressed as more sinful than heterosexual activity outside of marriage, it is that homosexual activity is not considered sin.

In fact our nation is moving towards the direction of shutting the mouth of those who call homosexual activity as immoral or sinful through the “Hate Crime” bill which has passed the House and is now in the Senate. We are moving towards not only accepting homosexual activities as normal, we are putting those who do these things in a priveledges position. We are boasting about this life style.

A BALANCED APPROACH TO TALKING ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

Although homosexual practice is sin, let me give two responsibilities Christians have towards the homosexual. We need a balanced approach to sexual sins.

First, the church and Christians are to be on guard against what is called homophobia. We are not called to hate homosexuals. Homosexuality is sin, but Jesus loves sinners. So should we.

The church is to love the homosexual person, as a person who is made in the image of God and for whom Christ died. Many homosexuals only hear the judgmental attitude of the church. Homosexuality is only one of several sexual sins condemned in the Bible. They get more attention because they are open about the practice of their sin and they are trying to force society to accept this as normal and not immoral. But the church is to speak the truth in LOVE. Jesus loves all sinners, even us.

Our second responsibility is to direct all sinners to the way of God’s deliverance. This way is through trusting Jesus to control my sinful urges and behavior and by worshipping Him above all things, including myself. A very important point should be made in the I Corinthians 6 passage. After Paul lists the sins of fornications, idolatry, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, etc in verse 11 is says:

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 and by the Spirit of our God.

“And such were some of you.” Christians are not perfect, they are only forgiven. They are cleansed. They are justified. God can and will forgive us and cleanse us and keep us from any sin which has a controlling effect on our lives through the blood of Christ and the power of His Spirit. This is what we are to share with all sinners.

Keeping a balance between these two responsibilities is what we are called to do as Christians. If we only speak out the truth of the Biblical view of

homosexual behavior without love, then we will move towards being homophobia. If we only show compassion, but not speak the truth we will not help anyone see the need for God's healing word of the Gospel of cleansing and forgiveness and wholeness.

A CATALOG OF SINS

Finally Paul gives a list of about 22 sins which show the pervasive character of unrighteousness by those who have rejected God and refuse to have Him in their knowledge. Verses 29-31:

being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, {30} backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, {31} undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;

Some of these sins even Christians may not think of as very big sins. But all sin is sin in God's eyes and any sin can take a hold of our hearts, control us and lead us to destruction.

Another interesting point for those who think that our modern age more moral than the heathen of the ancient past. Paul wrote this list of sin about 2,000 years ago. Have we conquered any of them through psychology, religion, legislation, etc? No, we are dealing with the same set of sins that seek to control us and will control us if we refuse God's answer.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

What is the answer to man's sin and our nation's slide toward immorality? It is the Gospel. No wonder Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel because he knew that it is the only power of God that can turn men's hearts back to the Lord. The answer to a declining morality is to return to God and believe the Gospel. If we don't turn to God and believe the Gospel God's judgment on us will be to continue to take his restraint from allowing sin to control us and that sin will eventually destroy us.

Sin and immorality are very serious matters to God. God has given sinners over to their sins, but God has not given up on sinners. He sent His Son to this sinful world to destroy the works of Satan through His substitutionary atonement

and victorious resurrection. This is the good news of the Gospel. This is the power of God unto salvation!

Amen? Amen!