

Romans 1:28-32: From Idolatry to Depravity
Ryan Patty / 5.22.22 / Christ Community Church

Good morning Christ Community Church! My name is Ryan and I am one of the pastors here. If you have your bible, and I hope you do, I'd like you to go ahead and turn to the book of Romans as we finish out chapter 1 this morning.

Some years back, I heard a story about a college ministry group at a large university in the UK. The students came together and wanted to figure out a unique way to reach their fellow students with the Gospel. So they printed out Romans 1:18-32, our larger contextual passage this morning, with no verse numbers and in everyday language without saying it's from the Bible. Simply written as you and I would speak today. Then they distributed it around campus. Soon after this, the leaders of the ministry were called to go before the school authorities. The student leaders were told in no uncertain terms that they would be censored for this offensiveness that they distributed. The icing on the cake was that the school authorities demanded that the students bring forth the author of this offensive piece of writing! (Ferguson)

Humor aside, the first few chapters of Romans are offensive to many people, but in many respects we must ask the singular question: Will we sit under the authority of God's Word, or will we stand above it? Will we come to it saying God this is hard for me to embrace! Teach me to love you more than I love the things of the world and to submit my life to your revelation and not to my own desires and wants and feelings. Or will we tell God that we know better? That his ways aren't right, and that he must not be aware of what is happening in today's culture, for we are enlightened! And we know better.

No; the heart of the Christian is to submit our entire lives to all of God's Word, understanding that he has built into the fabric of creation a right ordering of life and an expectation that we live in accordance with his revealed standards and truths. But as Pastor Jeff opened up to us last week, that hasn't happened. Humanity in its sinfulness has, as it says in verse 21, failed to glorify God and failed to show Him gratitude. And this is the heart of idolatry. We are worship beings that will find something to worship. And when that isn't God, when we don't glorify God, when we don't acknowledge God as God, our hearts will fill the void with whatever else they can find in life, from work, to pleasure, to money, to freedom to anything.

It is as John Calvin said, the human heart is an idol factory. We incessantly produce something to fill the void...

And so our text this morning speaks to that, and we need to understand what is happening overall to understand specifically what Paul is getting at in this vice-list. So let's read our passage and then pray for God to help us to understand it:
28 And because they did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God, God delivered them over to a corrupt mind so that they do what is not right. 29 They are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness. They are full of envy, murder, quarrels, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 senseless, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful. 32 Although they know God's just sentence—that those who practice such things deserve to die—they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them.

Let's Pray.

I'd like to provide my outline to you then show you it in the text:

Paul's main point for this larger section is this,
MP: Gentiles have failed to acknowledge God as God;
Therefore:

1. God delivered them over to a corrupt mind
2. God delivered them over to an unrighteous life
3. God delivered them over to a willful celebration of darkness

Let's jump in:

Main Point: Gentiles have failed to acknowledge God as God

Now, throughout this sermon I will use Gentiles and humanity almost interchangeably because we have to hear ourselves in this statement. So for chapter 1, the focus is on Gentiles, for chapter 2 it's on Jews, and then in chapter 3 Paul can conclude Romans 3:23 - For **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Notice the bold there, all, so back to the point, when you hear gentiles recognize it is an apparent condition of humanity, for all of us, that we as the human race have failed to acknowledge God and His created order.

The failure has resulted, as verse 18 tells us, so that his wrath is revealed from heaven, it is uncovered, it is now made known on humanity. God stands behind this wrath as it serves a corrective purpose as Jeff said last week. And notice in verse

18 that it is from Heaven. This draws our thoughts to God. This wrath is from God, He sees all, he sees the sins of humanity and thus his wrath is revealed. And Paul is going to get to the point about how we can be shielded from this coming wrath but not yet, because chapter 1 is setting the stage for what has happened in history and what we see happening today. So chapter 1 is the problem, and before you even start to understand or comprehend or grasp the solution, you have to truly understand and wrestle with the problem.

So this wrath is revealed, but our question is why? What happened? Verse 21 coupled with verse 28 in our specific section today provides the answers:

21 For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened.

28 And because they did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God, God delivered them over to a corrupt mind so that they do what is not right.

Notice here. They did not glorify God, nor show him gratitude. Verse 28 Paul repeats the idea again: They did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God. This is the guiding theme of this section of chapter 1. When humanity fails to acknowledge God as God, fails to give him thanks, fails to glorify him, then it is a guaranteed fact that idolatry follows. When we start reading our bibles even from the beginning in Genesis, we understand something, God created us. He formed us and breathed life into us and commissioned Adam and Eve with a vocation, to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. This was a blessing, they were in covenantal relationship with God, they had everything they could ever need, but they believed the lie.

And as we know in Genesis 3 they disobeyed God and sin enters into the cosmos so that all things in creation, including us, are affected. Then, as the OT tells us, sin unfolds. It rapidly builds.

I remember about 11 years ago going camping in the Sawtooths with my wife's family. On this trip I was going to ask her to marry me. But about two days before, I'm going with my father in law and my brother in law on a long day hike up to the bench lakes. My younger brother in law, he's almost a decade younger, so I take full responsibility for what occurred here, but we had gone further ahead and stopped for a bit to wait on my father in law (something about being young and spry right?) and while waiting we noticed this good size rock perched perfectly. It was like the Lord put it there knowing it needed to be sent down the hill... So what did wise Ryan do? He sent it down the hill, or actually the side of the mountain, for

about a thousand feet, until the boom echoed across the valley. Unbeknownst to me, my father in law had come up the trail behind us and saw the final push and proceeds to rightly and directly lay into us for being, I'll use the word "unintelligent" and not recognizing there could be other hikers that we can't see, that there is a warning for forest fires and that rock could have caused a spark, and that generally it's unsafe to send boulders down the side of a mountain.

And when I think of that fond memory, I can't help but think of what happened in the fall. Adam and Eve knowingly disobeyed, but they had no idea the ramifications that that small bite would cause, as the boulder of sin rolls down the course of humanity. And that's what OT history shows us. It gets so bad that Scripture tells us that the Lord saw that human wickedness was widespread on the earth and that every inclination of the human mind was nothing but evil all the time. So the Lord judges the world with a flood. God's mercy is evident as he preserves humanity and chooses a covenant people for himself and they continually rebel against him. The boulder rolls and rolls down the hill so that the prophets declare, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

And Paul knows all of this. He's a student of the Scriptures, and he sees what's true via revelation and he looks around the pagan world he's inhabiting and he gives us this treatise in Romans 1 concerning *what has happened? What is the root of this widespread sin?* And how does he answer here? That what was true of Adam in the garden is true of us today. **Romans 1 is Adam reproduced in all of us.** We have exchanged the truth for a lie. We have failed to glorify God and to acknowledge him, that is to give him thanks and praise, and as such, the great exchange takes place. We give up God, and we get our sinful desires. And God in his wrath gives us over to them. And so the boulder keeps rolling...

So Paul tells us what has happened, Idolatry comes, and God's wrath is revealed. We have failed to acknowledge God as God. So what does God do? He delivers us over, and we see this In 3 ways from this text, and the first is this:

We, Gentiles, humanity, have failed to acknowledge God as God, therefore,

1. God delivered them over to a corrupt mind

28 And because they did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God, God delivered them over to a corrupt mind so that they do what is not right.

The first thing we see is that failure to acknowledge God as the rightful king of the universe brings about a *warping* of the mind. That word corrupt implies depraved, not approved, worthless. God made our minds with the capacity to reason, to think,

to live in the world that he has created and to understand it and to understand him through his revelation and to understand our place in creation. All of that is given to us so that we might acknowledge him. But idolatry and sin warp this. God gives us over to sin so that we look at this world apart from Him, we don't think we need him, and what God shows us is that our minds weren't made for that. They become corrupted when they don't think of the world with a God-filled rationality.

In C. S. Lewis' classic work *The Screwtape Letters* you have a greater demon named Screwtape training up his nephew, Wormwood, a junior demon, on what it means to battle against God and his people, and to be successful as a tempter, and Screwtape says this to Wormwood in chapter 4: "It is funny how mortals always picture us as putting things into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out." The best work is done by keeping things out.

By keeping God out and the things of God and his marvelous works, that's when the best work is done he's saying. And it's no different here. Corruption comes after a failure to keep God in the heart and mind.

You see, right thinking leads to right living. I understand this to be true theologically. A right thinking and acknowledgement of God leads to a right living and pursuit of holiness for him. There is a direct correlation here.

That is, in our progressive sanctification (all my youth students should know this term by now), our growing in Christ-likeness and being conformed to his image, that's our progress of sanctification, in this, a right thinking about who God is, what he has done for me in Christ, my place in this world, what is true of his creation a right apprehension and understanding of those things **leads me then to act in a manner that is in accordance with God's righteous standard.** Right thinking leads to right living.

And so that's what Paul starts with here, The Mind. Their minds become corrupted so that sin becomes inevitable. They don't think rightly of God, therefore their lives are going to follow that thinking and reflect that. Really what we have here is an undoing of our humanity at creation. Humanity was the crown of it all - created in the imago dei to love God and others and to reflect that love in our lives.

But instead our minds are given over and we reflect a sinful imago anthropos, we reflect the image of mankind. Of ourselves. And what does this giving over to a corrupt mind then lead to? (point #2)

2. God delivered them over to an unrighteous life

Look with me at the end of v. 28 through 31. God delivered them over to a corrupt mind so that they do what is not right. 29 They are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness. They are full of envy, murder, quarrels, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 senseless, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful.

We aren't going to do a study of every single one of these vices individually this morning, but notice the picture of an unrighteous life that Paul paints for us. Paul tells us explicitly in verse 29 - this is unrighteousness. This is the opposite of righteousness. This is how a corrupt mind will manifest itself in day to day life. And it's the inclusion of various sins and their placement next to others that truly astounds me. Paul knows what we are prone to doing here. In our self-righteousness, in our self-justification, that sinful part of our flesh that doesn't want us to recognize our sinfulness, doesn't want us to confess it to others, we can read over some list of sins, and say, well I don't do the worst of those things, I'm not THAT bad. But Paul gives us no room to wiggle out.

Well Paul, "I'm not a murderer.. I don't have blood on my hands like you did.." So then he puts envy and quarrels on either side of murder. Something that at one time or another has affected us all.

Well, Paul, I surely don't hate God, I love him! I could never be called a "God hater" like it says here. And he says, but you manifest a hate for God when you gossip or slander those created in his image..

Older kids and Students who are in here and listening, look with me at the passage at the end of verse 30... God through Paul includes disobedience to parents in a list like this. Now I'm not talking about here and there disobedience, part of growing up and maturing is understanding correction comes and no parent should demand perfection, that's a warning to us parents, no students, kids, I'm talking about a self-pride that leads you to say while you're under their authority, "I know better, mom or dad's rules are dumb. I don't need to obey... He includes THAT in a vice list like this. It is evidence of a corrupt mind that doesn't fear God when you are known for your disobedience to parents.

And look at the other vices.. Untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful.. Has that ever been you? Paul includes a list like this concerning the Gentiles and really all of humanity to recognize one thing: **In my sin I do those things. I'm guilty.** There is an unrighteousness in me. And as we think of our world we recognize this as well.

We see this in a culture that doesn't acknowledge God and definitely doesn't glorify him. And all of these things are present. We see a culture that is "God-hating" by hating their neighbor when we see and hear of racist thoughts or actions. A culture that celebrates the murder of children in the womb in the name of choice and freedom. A culture that demands the celebration of God's specific judgment in verses 26-27 (think on that, celebrating God's judgment) where it says that men and women abandoned natural sexual relations and instead become inflamed in lust for one another! Celebrates it! While then seeking to redefine the God-given creational boundaries in Genesis 1 and 2 by telling young children they instead can choose to be whatever they want. As a culture we are teaching our children not the things of God but instead how to idolize the self so that they end up disregarding God and his Word altogether.

We see a culture of envy that manifests in a ridiculous consumerism where our greed causes us to never be satisfied with what the Lord has provided. And on and on we could go.

This is the progression Paul lays out concerning the world history of humanity apart from him. When we don't acknowledge God as God, we turn to acknowledge something else. In that exchange, God gives us what we want and we see that first in a corrupt mind. We fail to think about God and his created order rightly. And our wrong thinking leads straight to an unrighteous life as we have seen, where we manifest that unrighteousness through the varying sins he outlines here. And lastly, Gentiles, humanity, us before the Lord converted our hearts, when we continue in this downward spiral, when the boulder of sin continues rolling down the mountain, where do we end up? (point #3)

3. God delivered them over to a willful celebration of darkness

This is one of the more sobering verses in all the bible, verse 32 of Romans 1. 32 Although they know God's just sentence—that those who practice such things deserve to die—they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them. The final end in Paul's progression is this: a willful celebration of that which is dark, sinful, and against the command of God. Couple of things to point out here.

First, Paul says the Gentiles know God's just sentence. Do you see it there? I take this to mean he is speaking of two things. First he is tying it back in with verse 19, that all humanity should understand from natural revelation that there is a God. But they don't. They willfully suppress it. And second, I think this again harkens back to creation. That even after the fall, Gentiles, humanity, understand God's revealed morality (His moral law) as written on their conscience.

So they should recognize that there is a God, and even further, all humanity understands some of his righteous decrees, they understand the basics of good and evil. But what happens? They suppress it.

And Paul expounds even further, they know the just sentence, they know that sin is deserving of death.

But their conscience has been seared. And evil breeds more evil as humanity's fallen state, as outlined here is perilous. And look at how the chapter closes. "They not only do them (ignoring God's wrath, ignoring the coming judgment, ignoring his righteous decrees), they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them."

This darkness is a scary thing. Because for many of those sins outlined in the vice list, we might not always be aware of them. Someone gossips about me and I might not know it. Or I have this pride that blinds me from recognizing it. Or our quarrels are hidden from the eyes of others, confined behind the walls of our homes. But this last statement is something else even further. It's why I labeled this point a willful celebration of darkness.

These people celebrate sin publicly. They encourage you in it. They are inflamed and encouraged at your participation in the things of darkness. **They applaud those who practice the sins.** We have all seen this in various ways, but this is the state of rebellion we see. No longer a hiding of sins, let's bring them out into the public eye not for confession and repentance, but for celebration and approval.

And it's that applaud language I can't get past. It's not a slow, sardonic clap, but a raucous cheer. Compare this with what we see in Hebrews 12 and the hall of faith "since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses" those faithful saints from centuries past who are encouraging us onward, cheering us towards faithfulness and delighting in our pursuit of Godliness.." And here we have just the opposite. It's the kingdom of the world, of Satan, versus the Kingdom of God. And I see these both progressing throughout Scripture until Christ comes again.

An approval and applause of sin, just like for Paul's readers, is the culture we inhabit. How then should we live and think? The rest of Romans is going to help us with that. But let me close with some application:

Application:

1. Always look to the Righteous One

Sometimes when walking through a text like this that spells out the bad news for us and our world in such a clear way, we can feel a weight, and we should. God, that's me. I recognize myself in the text. And so we are confronted with our sin and we know in our hearts and our very souls that we don't stand a chance of being in the presence of God apart from a miraculous work. Well I want to tell you, and encourage you this morning, that the miraculous work has been done. This is the beauty of Romans that we are going to see, but I can't put it more clearly than Romans 5:8 - 8 But God proves (demonstrates) his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, (while Romans 1 was still true of us, while we were hating God in our hearts and minds) Christ died for us. And it's that reality that we have to rest in and remind ourselves often of. Because this side of eternity sin plagues us, we wrestle with it, we struggle with unrighteousness. But it's in the midst of those moments that we must look to Christ, look to the perfect and righteous one all the more, who has done a work on our behalf and has secured salvation for those who trust in him.

One of my favorite stories is the Pilgrim's Progress, which is an allegory of the Christian life. We have various editions of the book in a kid's format as well and seek to read it with our kids because of how timeless it is. But there's one point in the story that always gets me. And it's Christian's, the main character's, burden. You see as he is navigating the Christian life he's carrying his burden (his pack) on his back and throughout the story it gets bigger and bigger. It's the burden of his knowledge of his sin, but it's also the guilt and shame that we still at times struggle with. Christ has saved us, but we feel at times overcome with the things we have done. And then one night Christian has a dream and he sees the narrow highway that leads to salvation and begins his journey. But the burden keeps weighing him down and making his journey all the more difficult. But then he arrives at the cross and Bunyan says, **"Then he stood still awhile to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him, that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked therefore, and looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks."** And then the story recounts how by gazing at the cross the burden falls off his back, rolls down the hill and into the sepulcher (that's the tomb in the rock) and he saw it no more. And Christian says these words:

"Thus far did I come laden with my sin,
Nor could aught ease the grief that I was in,
Till I came hither. What a place is this!
Must here be the beginning of my bliss!

Must here the burden fall from off my back!
Must here the strings that bound it to me crack!
Blest cross! blest sepulcher! blest rather be
The Man that there was put to shame for me!"

And in my kids children book he cries out, I'm free, I'm free! It is only as we look to the righteous one, Jesus Christ, that we can be free of our burdens. This is the picture of salvation and how it comes. It comes through the atoning work of Jesus Christ and the exchange of sins from our back to his, and in turn he gives us the cloak of righteousness. If you have yet to trust in Christ, please talk to someone around you about how you can have this freedom.

2. Love the lost and remember your salvation

Sometimes in the midst of a sermon like this when I mention the sin that is rampant throughout our society and culture, we can, at times, fall prey to pride, to a haughtiness. Looking down on others in their sin because we have been saved and they're doing things that are completely contrary to God and his Word. Friends, may that never be us. Engage in dialogue about sin of course, show people where their ideas and thoughts lead them in the degradation of society and culture, yes.

But guard your heart against judging those for such were some of you. The bible is clear, we should love the lost and talk about the grace of Jesus Christ (not sacrificing truth, they go hand in hand, holding both together), but we should desire that they, like we did, would come to a saving faith in Chris. So, love them.

Remember what the Lord saved you from as a motivation to be salt and light, to proclaim grace and truth in the midst of this world. Because this is where Paul is going in chapter 2 as he's going to indict the Jews for being so quick to judge Gentiles yet engaging in sin all the same. So may we love the lost, may we hold grace and truth together, and may we remember our salvation.