

Intro: This morning, we are going to hear what God has to say about a delicate topic, an explosive topic. It's a topic that bombards us daily in our culture.

We are living in a world blinded by sexual insanity. Thankfully, every once in awhile we hear some good news. This week I heard the report that 100,000 teenagers associated with the Southern Baptist Convention made a public pledge to obey God's Word by abstaining from pre-marital sexual activity and preserving themselves for their spouse to be. That is tremendous!

Even representatives from secular society realize we have a problem on our hands. President Clinton is behind a \$400,000 plan to combat teen pregnancy. In this week's U.S. News & World Report (June 29, 1994), John Leo wrote an article entitled, "Learning to Say No." In it he writes, "The idea of opposing early sex does seem to be gaining support. Douglass Besharov of the American Enterprise Institute argues that 'Younger teens especially should be unambiguously told to at least delay sexual activity. Schools have no compunctions about actively discouraging other unhealthy behaviors like smoking and drinking. They should be as aggressive about discouraging too early sex.'" Leo's article also sighted a study done by Marion Howard, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Emory University. The survey asked more than 1,000 teenage girls in Atlanta what they wanted to learn in sex education. 84% of the girls answered, "How to say no without hurting the other person's feelings." (p. 24)

Then Leo concludes, "Saying no presumably has quite a large constituency. Many girls don't want to drift into early sex and early motherhood, but they do. Their problem isn't a shortage of latex products but a lack of sense of self and a lack of social support for abstinence among friends and parents in our anything-goes sexual culture." (p. 24)

We are living in a sexually insane world. The few rays of sunshine I've just cited are hidden behind clouds of sexual folly. What is the problem?

As Bible believing Christians, we must affirm what the problem is NOT. The problem is not with sex itself. Sex is a gift from God. Sex is not bad, but good, when exercised within the God-given parameters of a marriage relationship.

Why then has sexual expression been so twisted and degraded in our society? Why is pornography a multi-billion dollar business? Why are we being bombarded constantly with the homosexual agenda? Why has sexual activity before and outside of marriage become commonplace? God's Word tells us in the first chapter of Romans.

This morning, Romans 1 will show us how to experience sexual sanity in a sexually insane world. Romans 1 will address two important issues for us. One, where we got off course. And two, how we can get back on course. Let's read Romans 1:18-27.

In 1965, only 8% of births were illegitimate. Today, the national figure has risen to 30%. That is, 3 out of 10 children born are conceived out of wedlock. In the

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

inner city, the statistic is as high as 80% (Colson, radio program 6/16/94). Where did we get off course as a society? Where did the sexual insanity originate?

Proposition: Romans 1:24-27 presents two evidences of the wrath of God upon society.

I. The first evidence of God's wrath on society is Sexual Confusion (24-25).

A. The Cause

B. The Effect

1. Idolatry led to Sensuality (24).

2. Sensuality led to Bondage (25).

II. The second evidence of God's wrath on society is Sexual Corruption (26-27).

A. The Cause

B. The Effect

1. Society is experiencing a Perversion (26).

2. Society is experiencing a Penalty (27).

Conclusion: Two steps to freedom...

1. Affirm the truth of God.

2. Accept the help of God.

I. The first evidence of God's wrath on society is Sexual Confusion (24-25).

Why is society experiencing sexual confusion? That was a question that plagued Paul, no doubt. When he wrote this letter to the Romans, he was in Corinth. Corinth housed the temple of the pagan goddess Aphrodite. That temple was home to hundreds of cult prostitutes who, in the name of religion, filled the city with sexual immorality. He lived in a world, like ours, marked by sexual confusion.

Where does sexual confusion originate? Notice the cause and effect relationship.

A. The Cause

To see the cause, take a look at the contrast of pronouns in Romans 1. To the Roman Christians, Paul wrote in v 6, "YOU are the called of Jesus Christ." You belong to Christ. The gospel of Christ has set you free. But what about the world? What is its condition? Notice v 24, "God gave THEM up." V 26, "For this cause God gave THEM up. V 28, "God gave THEM over."

Here's the cause. Sexual confusion is an evidence of God's wrath. How do I know that? V 18 says, "The wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness." Notice the tense, "IS revealed" (lit. "is being revealed"). Right now, in this present age, God is revealing His wrath. Last week we saw WHY He has revealed His wrath, in vv 18-23. God is revealing His wrath because mankind has suppressed the truth of God, ignored the person of God, and perverted the glory of God. That's why.

But how has He revealed His wrath? That's what Paul explains in verses 24 and following. God revealed His wrath against unregenerate people by "giving them up." Those are tragic words!

Harry Ironside summed it up years ago (31), "Because men gave God up He gave them up." God didn't reveal His wrath by sending fire from heaven (that will

come in the future). God revealed His wrath by letting sinful men go exactly where they wanted to go, down the trail of lust. And along with the right to choose, God also gave mankind the freedom to live with the consequences of that choice.

What are the consequences of abandoning, and being abandoned by God?

B. The Effect

Eph 4:19 says that the Gentiles "have GIVEN THEMSELVES OVER unto lasciviousness." How did God respond? He simply took His hands off, and let the world find out what life is like without Him. Here's what happened. The world invoked the wrath of God, which resulted in two deadly effects.

1. Idolatry led to Sensuality (24).

The idolatry is identified in v 23. Mankind changed the glory of God. Pagan society rejected the true God, and created false gods. That idolatry led to sensuality.

V 24 "God gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves." The word "uncleanness" has to do with moral impurity. When God gives up a society, the result is sexual confusion. God allows men to "dishonor their bodies."

Please don't miss the connection. Sexual perversion is the consequence of idolatry. Gross immorality grips a people when that people reject the true God and set up substitute gods in His place. Stuart Briscoe points out, "The article on 'Idolatry' in the Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible lists some of the better-known gods of the Mesopotamian pantheon: Ishtar, goddess of love; Nabu, the patron of science and learning; Nergal, the god of war and hunting." Then Briscoe draws this stinging indictment, "Today we sit in Ishtar Cinema, study in Nabu University, and yell our heads off in Nergal's Stadium--modern places and attitudes of worship (p. 47)."

There's the first deadly effect. Idolatry led to sensuality. Here's the second.

2. Sensuality led to Bondage (25).

V 25 "Who exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator." Sex is a gift from the Creator to His creation. There was no embarrassment about the subject prior to sin. God designed a husband and wife to enjoy this gift for both pleasure and procreation.

But don't miss this. Freedom is found within boundaries, not by chucking boundaries in unrestrained living. The sitcoms on TV want you to think that sensuality leads to freedom. It doesn't. Sensuality leads to bondage.

Let me illustrate. Suppose I decided I didn't like stop signs, since they cramp my style. And suppose I decided to repaint each stop sign "Go." That would be exchanging the truth for a lie. What's the problem? First, I don't have the authority to change the laws. I am not the law-giver. Second, there are serious consequences for ignoring and tampering with laws (like car wrecks, and jail time!).

That's what the world did. Mankind exchanged the truth of God for a lie (25). Literally, "THE lie. From the garden of Eden to this day, the devil's tactics are the same. He entices us with THE Lie. He says, "God doesn't know what's best. You do. You are the master of your own fate." Once the world bought that lie, the next

step followed. Mankind "worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator (25).

God made us. He knows what's best for us. He revealed to us the truth, knowing the truth is in our best interests. His will is good. Do you know when we are free? We are free when we choose to submit to His will. When we choose to do our own thing, in blatant disregard for His Laws, we are in grave trouble.

Our hamster "Mickey" has got it made. All he does is eat, sleep, and play, within the safe confines of his cage. But suppose he said, "My master is a fuddy-duddy. He locked me up inside this stuffy cage. He won't let me have any fun. I want to be free! I want to get out and do my own thing in the real world!" Do you know how long he'd last in the "real" world? Five minutes, until our cat got him. Those boundaries are for his own good, whether he realizes it or not.

Allow me to speak pointedly. Some of you have been thinking, "My marriage is cramping my style. My spouse is a bore. I want out. I want to be free." Listen, running from a relationship doesn't result in freedom, but in bondage. God set up the boundary in His Word, "One man, one woman, till death do us part."

I know a man who was married for 27 years. He chucked that marriage for the freedom of a younger woman. The result? Some momentary, sensual pleasure, and a whole lot of eternal heartache.

We can't play games with God's unchanging laws. When we cash in the truth of God for a lie, we end up in bondage. That's what Paul says. We end up "serving the creature" instead of our Creator. Sensuality leads to bondage.

Application: We hear a lot about the sexual "revolution." Words like "freedom" and "enlightened" are tossed around. Listen, beloved, we're not experiencing a revolution, but a devolution. It's not freedom, but bondage. Nor is it enlightenment, but blindness. We need deliverance. It's available, too, in Christ.

Romans 1 is like a courtroom scene. With the logic of a brilliant attorney, Paul is showing why the whole world needs God's righteousness in Christ. The world is experiencing the wrath of God. The first evidence of that wrath is sexual confusion.

II. The second evidence of God's wrath on society is Sexual Corruption (26-27).

The second evidence of God's wrath also involves a cause/effect relationship.

A. The Cause

Notice the cause in v 26. Though the grammar is past tense, the description is contemporary. "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections." There's the second listing of that dreadful phrase.

God is not passive towards idolatry. His activity is very directive. He "gave them up." Because mankind rejected God, He unveiled His wrath, and gave them up. The first evidence was sexual confusion. The second is even more degrading, that being sexual corruption.

B. The Effect

What are the effects of this second handing over by God? There are two.

1. Society is experiencing a Perversion (26).

Listen to the description of the effect (vv 26-27), "God gave them up unto vile affections (NASB "degrading passions"; lit. "passions of disgrace")." What are vile affections? The following tells us.

V 26 "For even their women did exchange the natural use for that which is against nature." Here's the second exchange mentioned in the passage. The first occurred in v 25 when mankind exchanged the truth of God for a lie. Here unregenerate mankind exchanged the natural for the perverse. Women exchanged heterosexual relationships for homosexual relationships. But not just women.

V 27 "And likewise ('in the same way') also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men, working that which is unseemly."

Paul lived in an age of unparalleled sexual corruption. In the first 500 years of the Roman Empire, there is not one single recorded case of divorce. But by Paul's day, immorality was rampant. Seneca wrote (Barclay, 32), "Women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married." And the vice only grew worse.

Greek and Roman society regarded homosexual love to be not only acceptable, but superior to heterosexual love (Cranfield, 36). They believed their gods indulged in homosexual acts. What's more, fourteen out of the first fifteen emperors in the Roman Empire were homosexuals. That vice eventually ruined Rome.

Against that dark backdrop, Paul wrote these words of indictment. Homosexuality is not "natural." It is a perversion. God condemns it. As Stuart Briscoe observed (51), "In short, confusion about God breeds confusion about man, which breeds confusion about sexuality which produces sexual confusion and chaos."

Application: Is a person born with a homosexual tendency? Scholars today want to say that certain people have a certain "predisposition" which makes homosexual behavior, not only excusable, but legitimate. Is that true? That's not the issue, is it? Some people are born with a bent to overeat. Others have a strong proclivity to be liars. Others have a weakness with alcohol. What do people who struggle with overeating, and lying, and alcohol, as well as homosexuality, need to do with their weaknesses? Excuse the behavior? No. Submit that weakness to Christ, and experience His overcoming power. Why? Because God condemns homosexuality as a perversion (for further study: Gen 18:20ff; I Cor 6:9-10; Jude 7)

Here's the second effect of sexual corruption. Society is experiencing perversion.

2. Society is experiencing a Penalty (27).

Consider the description of that penalty at the end of v 27, "And receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was fitting." Deviant sexual behavior has a penalty attached to it.

A report last year from the Family Research Institute confirmed the deadly consequences of the homosexual lifestyle. The average age of homosexual men dying with AIDS is 39. The average age of gays dying of all other causes is 41. (The average heterosexual married man lives 75 years.) Gay men are three times more

likely to have alcohol or drug abuse problems. Homosexuals are 14 times more likely to have had syphilis, and 23 times more likely to contract venereal diseases. In San Francisco, America's most openly gay city, the rate of infectious Hepatitis A is twice the national average. Yes, sexual corruption has a severe penalty.

What's the point of our study? Some are thinking, "I don't like to think about such topics. It's dismal. I wish you'd preach about something positive." Others are thinking, "That's what we need, more preaching about the wrath of God. Those crums in society are going to get it!"

Please don't go to either extreme. The purpose of Romans 1 is twofold. We have learned how we got off track as a society. Our world turned from God, and is experiencing the consequence of the wrath of God. The evidences are the sexual confusion and sexual corruption.

Now, the pressing question. How do we get back on track?

Conclusion: Two steps to freedom...

1. Affirm the truth of God.

Read v 25 again. Society got off track when what happened? "Who exchanged the truth of God for a lie." If our society is to get off the trail that leads to destruction, we must affirm the truth of God. We must stop playing games with God. He knows best. We must submit to Him, and affirm His truth.

In God's eyes, sin is sin. Yet is there a worse sin than homosexuality? You may be surprised to know, in one sense, there is. Do you know what it is? Refusing to accept the truth of Jesus Christ. Listen to what Jesus said in Mt 10:15, "Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gommorah in the day of judgment, than for that city." What was Sodom and Gommorah's crime? Gross sexual perversion. What city will face worse judgment than Sodom? The city that won't receive the word of Christ (14).

Here's the first step to freedom. We must affirm the truth of God.

2. Accept the help of God.

That's Paul's chief point in Romans 1. This world needs help! It's under the wrath of God. And help is available. Where?

V 16 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation." The gospel of Christ saves. The gospel of Christ rescues people from the wrath of God. The gospel of Christ helps people enslaved by sin.

These two steps lead to freedom for a society. They also lead to freedom for individuals. Are you enslaved to sin? Do you want to be free? Then do this. Affirm the truth of God. And accept the help of God that's available through Jesus Christ.