

ROMANS

Part 4: “The Weight of Our Sin”

Romans 1:24–32

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Scripture Reading

At Redeemer, we value what is known as *expository preaching*. That’s a term that means the primary diet of our preaching ministry comes through walking through entire books of the Bible as a congregation.

We do this for several reasons. We believe it helps Christians be more equipped to read Scripture for themselves. We believe it helps us see how the good news of Jesus is found in all of the Bible. But we also do this because it causes us to confront hard topics and texts that our culture or sense of convenience might tempt us to avoid.

Today’s passage is one of those section is one of those that our culture would want to close its ears to. But may the Lord grant us teachable minds and humble hearts as we encounter his inspired truth. Our Scripture reading is Romans 1: 24–32:

“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them” (Rom 1:24–32).

Heavenly Father, may your spirit reveal to us the love that you have for your people. Give us grace to see our need for Christ, you Son. Give us the peace that comes from resting in your gospel of grace. In Jesus’s mighty name we, pray, AMEN.

Introduction

Kate and I have three sons, who are all currently in elementary school. It's a fun stage of life. We've finally graduated from baby food and diapers, and for the most part, our kids are finally able to sleep through the night.

But we are not that far removed from that stage of constant, non-stop hyper-vigilance that comes from being parents of toddlers; toddlers who are constantly doing things that could harm or kill themselves.

We're not that far removed from that stage of life in which, while we were playing in the front yard, we needed to make sure a kid would run into the street.

But here's the thing: sometimes children want to run into the street. Maybe they desire to chase a ball that got away. Maybe they want to run away from their sibling who is chasing them. Whatever the case, if they are given their desire, it could lead to their death and destruction.

So imagine for a moment being a parent of a child who is running towards the street while two cars are rounding the corner from different directions. All the child sees what he desires. You, however, are able to see that the end of that desire is death.

*What does love look like in such a moment?**

Would it be *loving* to give the child what he wants and desires? Is it to respectfully yield to the autonomy and self-determination of the child and let him live his truth?

Or does love look like warning him; speaking forcefully, directly, and *urgently*—even if such words provoke sorrow and even rage from the child?

To love is to desire and seek the highest good of another. That means that there are times when love must intervene, when love must confront, when love must tell us truth we don't want to hear.

And because God truly loves his people, there are many parts of his word that have confronted and offended different cultures in different ways across the centuries. The incarnation of Christ was scandalous to ancient Greek culture, who thought that the material universe was only evil. The notion of forgiving one's enemies can seem like shameful weakness in honor-shame cultures. The Bible's unconditional valuing of the dignity of women and children, as well as the poor and the vulnerable have cofounded cultures built on patriarchy and power.

Our culture today might find the doctrines of the incarnation, forgiveness, and human dignity non-offensive and even beautifully compelling. However, we struggle to hear the truth of God's word in passages like the one that is before us today.

But I pray that Lord would give us the grace to hear the words of God's truth in light of the reality of his love. I pray we can hear these words less like a petty tyrant who arbitrarily edicts and decrees and more like a loving father who fiercely desires the highest good for his children.

Today, we are talking about *"The Weight of Our Sin."* For only when we know the weight of our sin will we know the worth of our Savior.

Exposition

Let's begin by way of review.

The Apostle Paul has been building a case. He is showing Roman Christians, and he is showing us, the reality of our need, the reality of our guilt, and the reality of why we need the gospel.

He tells us we all have an innate knowledge of God and innate need to worship. But instead of worshipping our Creator and stewarding his creation, we have worshipped creation and suppressed our knowledge of God.

Paul says, *"Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen"* (Rom 1:24–25).

The wrath of God, according to Romans 1, is when he allows us to have the desires that bring forth destruction upon ourselves and the world around us. Our disordered desires have opened the door to the hostile powers of sin and death into our world. And sin and death have twisted, fractured, and distorted God's good creation.

Now, the Apostle is going to give us specific examples of ways that distort the design of God's creation.

1.) Sins of Dishonorable Passion

Let's read the text: *"For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error"* (Rom 1:26–27).

This is a passage about sexual sin in general and homosexual practice in particular. It's one of the key passages in the Bible that shows homosexual desire and behavior are outside of God's design for his people.

Now, sex and sexuality are a part of the goodness of God's creation. But our Creator has set defined limits in which human sexuality flourishes. The context in which human

sexuality flourishes is an enduring, faithful covenant marriage between one man and one woman.

According to Scripture, the design for marriage and sexuality is not a construct of society—it is not something people have conjured. Rather, God’s design for sexuality in the context of marriage is a creational ordinance—it is something that our Creator God has woven into the very fabric of creation. As such, sexuality in the context of faithful, godly marriages can lead to joy and flourishing, not just for individuals, but for families and broader society as well.

Marriage isn’t always godly. And sadly, even between believers, marriage doesn’t always work. But when marriage does work, when a Christian marriage emanates mutual love and respect, Ephesians 5 tells us such a marriage is a picture of the faithful love that exists between Christ and the church (cf. Eph 5:32). Healthy human sexuality in the context of a biblical marriage is a way that the gospel is declared and displayed to a watching world.

However, anything outside of that vision of human sexuality is what Romans 1 calls “*contrary to nature*.” It misses the mark. It is—by definition—sin. That includes sex before marriage and sex outside of marriage. It also includes sex between members of the same sex.

Same-sex desire is real. It is an instinctively occurring phenomenon for segment of society. But not all instinctive desires morally are acceptable. And *Christians* who are tempted toward same-sex desire are all called to submit those desires to Christ.

There is a man named Sam Allberry, who is a pastor at a church in Nashville. He is a man who openly acknowledges that he is tempted toward same-sex attraction. However, he is also a man who deeply values the authority of God’s word. As such, he has chosen to live a life of faithful singleness and celibacy to honor the Lordship of Jesus in his life.¹

He wrote a very short but very powerful book titled *Is God Anti-Gay?*. And I recommend it as a sound resource on this very volatile social issue that affects many in many different ways.

In his book, Allberry draws attention to a teaching of Jesus in Matthew 16, wherein he tells his disciples, “*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*” (Matt 16:24).

Regarding this passage, Allberry says something profound that I think is worthy of quoting at length. He says,

¹ For the believer, if you cannot or will not or do not have the opportunity to enter into a marriage that God would bless, then faithfulness looks like God-honoring celibacy. And like marriage, celibacy is depicted as a spiritual gift and has a place of honor in the church (cf. Matt 19:10–12; 1 Cor 7:7–8).

It is the same for us all...I am to deny myself, take up my cross and follow him. Every Christian is called to costly sacrifice. Denying yourself does not mean tweaking your behaviour here and there. It is saying 'no' to your deepest sense of who you are, for the sake of Christ. To take up a cross is to declare your life (as you have known it) forfeit. It is laying down your life for the very reason that your life, it turns out, is not yours at all. It belongs to Jesus. He made it. And through his death he has bought it.

*Ever since I have been open about my own experiences with homosexuality, a number of Christians have said something like this: 'the gospel must be harder for you than it is for me,' as though I have more to give up than they do. But the fact is that the gospel demands **everything** out of all of us. If someone thinks the gospel has somehow slotted into their life quite easily, without causing any major adjustments to their lifestyle or aspirations, it is likely that they have not really started following Jesus at all.*

Christ has called us to die to self that we might live in union with him. That call includes a dying to whatever disordered desire we may have towards sex.

Yet, I know these are very hard words to hear for many in our world today. *The biblical sexual ethic is to many in our culture what money was to the Rich Young Ruler.*² There are people who I love that have left this congregation or refuse to be a part of this congregation because we are committed to believing and teaching what the Bible has to say on this issue. Yet, *with humble fear and trembling, we must be a people who submit our lives to the authority of God's word rather than the spirit of the age.*

Nevertheless, it is also true that there are far more sins that are outside of God's design for his creation and his people. And that leads us to the next point.

2.) Sins of a Debased Mind

Paul writes, *"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done"* (Rom 1:28).

When we do not acknowledge God as God, sin warps our minds toward a depraved way of thinking and living that can manifest in thousand different ways. We are not all tempted the same way, but we are all tempted.

Paul then lists twenty-one behaviors that flow from a mind bent and twisted by sin. We're going to attempt to go through all twenty-one listed here.

"They were filled," Paul says in verse 19, "with all manner of **unrighteousness and evil.**" This refers to a blatant disregard for, a breaking of, and animosity toward God's moral law.

² This illustration is indebted to Pastor J.R. Vassar.

“**Covetousness**” (πλεονεξία) is a word that I think is more clearly translated as “*greed*.” It is a sin that is talked about surprisingly little in many parts of the American church and in broader American society. It’s a sin that remarkably few people think they are guilty of themselves. It is, instead, a hidden and often unconscious sin. But greed is simply the hoarding of wealth. The mindset that says, “*I can never have enough, and I must have more.*” It is a sin that breaks communities, destabilizes nations, and breeds corruption among the powerful.

“**Malice**” means active animosity. The use of hateful words that are intended to mock and wound. Sadly, if you want to see evidence of malice, all you need to do is browse Facebook or a YouTube comment section for less than five minutes. I believe screens often dimmish our ability to see that the voices on the other side are living, breathing human beings who are imbued with the image of God. To write and post words of malice online is sinful, shameful unchristian behavior that is modeled after the world and not after Christ. If you are doing this, you need to humbly repent.

“**Envy**” desiring to take away that which gives pleasure to another. It is when we become livid and enraged when another experiences joy. As in the case of Cain, envy can breed “**murder**” (cf. Gen 4:1–16). Sometimes that murder manifests through actual physical violence. Sometimes that murder appears in the form of hatred that poisons our hearts.

“**Strife**” is division where there should be unity. Strife is when the sin of selfishness breaks the bonds that should bind marriage, families, church, and nations in union with one another.

“**Deceit**” is spreading untruth or the deliberate twisting of the truth, oftentimes to the advantage of the deceiver.

“**Maliciousness**” is the exact inverse of love. It is actively seeking and willing bad for another.

“**Slander**” is telling lies to hurt someone else. And it is a sad truth of our times that if people speak words of slander with enough confidence, people will believe them.

“**Gossip**” means spreading rumors, confessing another’s sin, and causing another’s shame for the sake of amusement or as a way to feel superior to others.

“**Haters of God**” describes those that resent God’s authority, mock his reality, and blaspheme his name.

“**Insolent**,” “**Haughty**” and “**boastful**” refer to unrestrained pride and arrogance. The haughty and boastful mock the virtue of humility and scorn the spiritual fruit of gentleness.

“Inventors of evil” refers to the God-given gift of creativity to conjure new forms of sin. This often comes from a desire to scandalize, garner attention, and create controversy.

“Disobedient to parents” refers to another breaking of God’s creational design. Lacking honor for parents is a way we display a lack of love for God. This sin spreads in cultures that have become so allergic to authority that even the most fundamental of relationships is rejected and resented.

To be **“foolish”** is to be wise in your own eyes and refuse correction. Foolishness is not lack of intelligence. It is the inability to be humbly teachable.

To be **“faithless”** to believe integrity is a liability and promises are cheaply made and easily broken.

To be **“heartless”** is to possess no compassion; it is to be so numbed by selfishness that we lose the ability to feel the pain or suffering of others.

To be **“ruthless”** is to buy into the hellish lie that selfish ends justify evil means, even if it requires the innocent suffering of others.

This is a long list of sins. But do they not describe the honestly describe the sin-fractured world we live in?

It is easy to recognize these sins in the world, but are we willing to recognize them in our own hearts? Or will we succumb to the temptation of justifying sin when it is *our* sin?

That leads us to our final point.

3.) The Sin of Justifying Sin

Let’s look at the final verse of our reading today: **“Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them”** (Rom 1:32).

To justify sin or approve of sin is far more than saying, “Hey, we are all imperfect, and we all are tempted in various ways.” Paul is addressing much more than just a posture of mercy or even tolerance who are struggling with or willfully plunged in sin.

What Paul is talking about is the mentality that sin should be accepted and affirmed as morally righteous.

And Paul isn’t the only biblical voice to urgently warn against such a posture. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah pronounced, **“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!”** (Isa 5:20).

It is a grievous tragedy that many of the things that are listed by the Apostle in this passage as things as obvious examples of the brokenness in creation and a distortion of nature are today lionized and celebrated within our culture today.

Our culture believes that greed is good and even necessary for the growth of the economy. Our culture looks to sexual sin that enslaves and dehumanizes and calls it liberation. Our culture doesn't bat an eye at malicious and slanderous words, but instead likes them and shares them on social media as if they were part of a righteous cause. Our culture celebrates arrogance and calls it strength.

Some will even go so far as to construct theologies that envision God as approving of sins his word clearly condemns. There are entire theologies that are created to give divine sanction to our culture's preferences, sexual ethics, and worldly politics.

But this is an attempt to reduce the true God to a lesser god that humans would seek to manage by our rationality, cultural preferences, or sinful desire. Such a god is simple enough for our minds to comprehend, safe enough to manage, and will even be willing to coddle and compromise with our idols. But such a god is remarkably small and nothing more than an idolatrous figment of man's imagination.

It is the mercy of God for his word to shine into our darkness and shatter the illusions created by sin. It is God's mercy to remind us of the splendor of his holiness and the perfection of his glory.

Conclusion

I know today's sermon might feel weightier than normal. But this *passage* is weightier than normal. And rather than avoid the discomfort such passages cause, let us allow these words to inspire us to cling to the salvation that only Christ can give!

Romans 1:24–32 paints a picture of what life outside of Christ looks like. It is a portrait of life under the dominion of the principalities and powers. It is a vision of how creation unravels before the destructive might of sin.

Paul is exposing the behavior that Christ has saved us from; what he is calling his people out of; what he desires to liberate us from!

And here's the really good news: *Jesus is a lot better at saving than we are at sinning.* For that reason, we can confront hard passages like this without fear!

Our sin is great, but our Savior is greater! Our sin is weighty, but our Savior is worthy!

At the cross, Jesus took the penalty of our sin. And in his resurrection, he defeated the power of death. We cannot earn or deserve his grace. But we can receive it with the empty hands of faith.

So Redeemer Christian Church, may we lay aside all sin and weight that clings to us and look to Jesus. May we confess our sins to him for he is faithful and just to forgive. May we bring our sins to the foot of the cross, where we will not find condemnation, but rather love and amazing grace!

AMEN.

Discussion Starters for Gospel Community

- 1.) Read Romans 1:24–32 out loud.
 - 2.) What is the connection between the idolatry mentioned in Romans 1:24–25 and the list of sins in Romans 1:26–32?
 - 3.) What are ways that our culture attempts to justify and celebrate the sins listed in this passage (cf. Rom 1:32)?
 - 4.) Paul shares this list of sins to convince his readers why they/we need Jesus. Why is important to allow Scripture to confront and exposes our sins, even when passage like this can be hard to read? How does the weight of our sin ultimately show us the worth of our Savior?
- BONUS:** In relation to this sermon, Pastor David recommended the book *Is God Anti-Gay?* by Sam Allberry. This would be a great book to potentially read through and discuss as a Gospel Community at some point.