

ATHEISTS ARE MADE, NOT BORN - The Biblical Psychology of Modern Atheism - Part five

Teaching #1928 - Sunday, November 27th, 2016 - 10:00 a.m.

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THE DENIAL OF GOD AND SEXUAL IMMORALITY

Romans 1:18-27 - "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. [21] For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. [24] Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] 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. [26] For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; [27] 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."

The issue of same-sex intercourse can never be discussed just as an evangelical hot-button. It's not an issue of loving or not loving people with same-sex attractions. Any hatred expressed toward gay human beings is unchristian just as accepting the practice of homosexuality is also unchristian.

The passage before us today *isn't* unique in its condemnation of homosexuality. There are others. What *is* unique about today's text is the *meaning* it gives to homosexual practice. This passage *frames* the whole issue of homosexuality - gives the *big* picture.

One other thing to notice in our text today. It is certainly true and important to remind ourselves that the Bible condemns *all* sexual immorality. In fact, the Bible has *more* to say about immoral *heterosexuality* - sexual practice *before* marriage and *outside* of marriage - than it does about *homosexuality*. The only unique feature of homosexuality is the current inclination to take a sinful temptation and define an *identity* by it. But it is still true we are *all*- heterosexual and homosexual - oriented wrongly left to our own desires.

That being the case it *is* strange and striking that in today's text Paul *limits* or *aims* his sexual comments specifically and exclusively to immorality of a *homosexual nature*. We need to find out *why* this is the case.

The final point I want to make is this is the closing message in our series on *atheism*. And this text, more than any other I know of, binds together the *suppression of divine revelation* with the *sin of homosexuality*. In this link I *don't* mean this text states *all* sexually immoral people *deny* God's existence. That's plainly not the case. But there is still a link with *suppressing divine revelation* and committing *homosexual sin*. And that idea needs careful processing.

1) **THE DIVIDING POINT IN OUR TEXT COMES AT VERSE 24 - AND IT MARKS A VERY IMPORTANT EMPHASIS ON PAUL'S ARGUMENT**

I think it's so important to begin at this point. It forms the whole logic of Paul's *big picture* argument. Just pause again and look at the flow of ideas as **verse 24** becomes the heart of the text:

Romans 1:22-25 - "Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. [24] **Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity**, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] 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."

Note very carefully. Before our text this morning the last time Paul mentions a specific action of God is **Romans 1:18** - "For **the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men**, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."

God is revealing His wrath against man's "*suppression*" of the truth. But that's all Paul says about God's wrath until he picks up the theme again in **verse 24** - "Therefore **God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity**, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves...."

So the *way* God reveals His wrath is He "*gives them up*" to what they worship in their hearts. They *refused to honor God as God*(21). They *relied on their own wisdom - what seems right and fair to the prevailing culture*. And divine revelation will *always* appear unrealistic and intolerant when measured by the prevailing culture.

Think about this. Satan doesn't have to work to prove divine revelation *untrue*. He merely makes it appear *unreasonable* measured by the view of the surrounding cultural pressure.

But Paul's point in **verse 22** is the voice of culture has *exchanged divine revelation for their own human desires*. They "*served the creature rather than the Creator*"(25).

Those are the sins. This is what mankind has constantly done. And, says Paul, God has "*revealed His wrath*" against these sins. This is where the "*Therefore*" in **verse 24** enters the picture - "Therefore **God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity**, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves...."

This "*giving them up*" is the most terrible form of God's wrath. It's the most terrible because it lacks the dramatic instant pain other forms of God's judgment often bring. When *Jonah* is swallowed by the whale he *repents*. When the *children of Israel* are bitten by poisonous snakes they cry out to God. When *Ananias and Sapphira* are struck dead by the Lord the whole church hungers after God.

But when God gives people up to their own hearts there is no incentive to repent. We're left wondering where all the pain and brokenness is coming from. Our sin looks more and more normal. And God seems to pay less and less attention. Things just begin to smooth out in our sinful patterns of life.

This is the rationale behind the fevered recruitment of the wicked for additional sinners - **Romans 1:32** - "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. Notice that important word, ***“approval.”*** No one likes ***disapproval.*** As more and more people ***approve*** of any sin that sin takes on ***legitimacy.*** After all, everyone can't be wrong. So such a culture dumps ***disapproval*** on the only place left in a fallen culture - ***God and those who dare to honor Him.***

LIFE LESSON: When God judges by giving a culture over to its own sin it becomes more and more difficult for that culture to imagine God could ever be against something so widely accepted and justified. God's wrath appears less and less reasonable to culturally adjusted sin.

To see the truth of this all you have to do is imagine a scene with me.

Pretend it was possible for you to enter some kind of time machine. Imagine you could just enter and set the dial to go back in time just 75 years. You land in Canada and it's now 1941. You have to adjust your moral perspective because you suddenly realize no one openly approves of same-sex intercourse. There is not one sit-com on TV with even the mention of a gay couple. There is no mention of homosexuality in any classroom in the country. There isn't a university professor endorsing a gay life-style. No adoption agency will even consider a gay couple as candidates for a child. There is not a politician on the horizon who pushes any kind of gay agenda.

My point here is not that there weren't any gay people in 1941. That's ridiculous. My point isn't even that there were fewer gay people then. But here's what I know for sure. Every Christian found it easier to accept that God's revelation in Scripture was totally opposed to it. No one found it ***unreasonable*** of God to condemn homosexuality.

And the reason is simple. God's revelation seemed a better fit into at least society's public framework of sexuality. And the only difference in 2016 is God's revelation, though exactly the same, doesn't make as much sense. And what you're looking at in that recognition is the fruit of Paul's words in ***Romans 1:24*** - ***“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves....”***

After that kind of incremental judgment from God His standards appear less and less reasonable. This is exactly what Paul was driving at when he said ***“....claiming to be wise they became fools”***(22). This isn't some mouthy mob group screaming with clenched fists, ***“We're wiser than you, God! So there!”*** That's not it at all. This is a calmly reasoned, rationally argued position that God's revelation doesn't seem fair. It hurts lonely people. He seems too narrow-minded. This is the kind of religion that just breeds ***intolerance*** in this world. Surely this kind of thinking needs to evolve.

That is the essence of humanly exalted wisdom. It defines its own conclusions as a better wisdom than God's revelation. And the result is the morphing of an imaginary God who is just like us. The process is as old as the Psalms - ***Psalm 50:21*** - ***“These things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself....”***

This again is God's ***unrecognized wrath.*** People dive deeper into sin, assuming God's silence means acceptance.

2) GOD'S LESSON ON HOW HE EXPECTS US TO LEARN ABOUT INVISIBLE FACTS

The first truth suppression is dealt with in Romans 1:19-20 - "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For *his invisible attributes*, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

The whole of Romans 1 stands on the logic of these verses. Paul's whole argument hangs on these words. And his whole logic is simple. *God's revelation of Himself moves from the visible to the invisible*. No one can see God's *divine nature* or His *eternal power*. Power is *invisible* until it *does something*. And God's *divine nature* is *Spirit*. You can't see Him in His divine state.

And yet Paul says it's not hard to *perceive* these realities. In fact, he says these realities are virtually impossible to miss. They are, in his words, "*clearly perceived*" (20), and it's *inexcusable* not to know them (20).

So God unveils His revelatory method. Yes. There are things invisible to the naked eye. But they aren't *unknowable*. There is a pathway - a clear pathway - into invisible truth "*...in the things that have been made*" (20). Don't make it complicated. Look at what is *made*. That's where the truth lies.

3) THE LOGIC PAUL APPLIES TO KNOWING AN INVISIBLE GOD THROUGH WHAT IS MADE HE ALSO APPLIES TO HUMAN SEXUALITY

Romans 1:24-28 - "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] 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. [26] For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; [27] 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. [28] 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."

The exact meaning of the middle of **verse 27** is constantly debated. My own view is *both* verses **26** and **27** describes same-sex relations. And that takes us right into a question I raised earlier. Given there are so many forms of distorted and forbidden sexual relations, why Paul's exclusive emphasis on *same-sex* relations?

And I believe that best explanation is found in the context we have just been analyzing. Paul is simply *continuing* his logic of recognizing divine truth from *what is made*. He's continuing the very same point from verse 20 - "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

"*...In the things that have been made....*" Same-sex relationships *aren't* more sinful than other sexual sins. But they do most clearly serve Paul's purpose in this chapter. They are the most vivid example of *not* looking at what has been designed and made.

You and I have been **made**. And we've been made in certain ways. We ourselves are a part of that revelatory process. Invisible, intangible aspects of our being there certainly are. You can't see **sexual orientation**. You can't see what is increasingly labeled aspects of **"fluid gender."**

Consider these words from the **October National Post** on the stance of University of Toronto professor, **Jordan Peterson**:

"By now most of the country is familiar with the story of one professor, Jordan Peterson, at the University of Toronto, who has expressed strong and vivid dissent over the university's attempt to force him to use certain words — ersatz pronouns, a batch of neologisms (ze, zim, zer, and a raft of others, in place of he or she) coined by progressive groups, intended to apply to students who "self-identify" as other than the archaic and obsolete designations of man and woman.

Prof. Peterson will not use these new cant words. He will not be ordered by the university, or pressured by activists, to take their words and put them in his mouth. He goes further and insists that it is an abandonment of academic freedom, and freedom of speech more generally, for the university or others to insist or attempt to mandate such a practice. He has made three videos arguing his case. He points out the ideological forces, the "political agenda" behind "language politics," and correctly argues and identifies that there is far more at stake in this instance than some local gripe about grammatical commonplaces on a single campus.

As a consequence, Peterson received from his university two letters of reprimand and warning...."

What most Christian miss is there is more at stake than human rights here. This is an issue the Apostle Paul saw coming. Our text lands right here. There are invisible things. But we can still find our way through competing views and conflicting truth claims. **Look at what is made.** Sexual relationships aren't a mystery. Look at what has been **made**. Look at its design. Gender isn't mysterious. **Look at what has been made.** There is no excuse for not knowing God's will. These are things **"clearly perceived"** through **"what has been made."**

Romans 1 is one of the great chapters of the Bible. It contains the history of the world. The only way to avoid it is to **"suppress the truth."**