

Romans

The Advancement of Evil

October 26, 2014

- I. Paul's foundational information for understanding the rest of Romans
 - A. Romans 1:18-32 . . .
 1. Last Sunday we ended with verse 17 of Romans 1, and today we will pick up from there and look at verses 18-32.
 2. We usually begin our book studies with a reading of the text to be examined. However, because I have broken these 15 verses into four parts, I will read each part as we get to it.
 - B. Prayer
- II. The progressive advancement of evil
 - A. One of the dependable truths of those who live a God-fearing life – be it during OT times or NT times – is that the more we grow and mature in our trust of God, and the more we put off our old sinful nature, and the more we die to self, and the more we pursue holiness in all our behavior, the nearer we draw to God. And this is important, because James 4:8 tells us that if we draw near to God, He will draw near to us.
 1. Now for the sincere believer, that is, the one who lives by faith, this path invariably produces a growing understanding and application of God's word. It promotes increasingly frequent prayer. It results in a heightened sensitivity to ungodliness – first in yourself and then in the world around you. It leads to a broken and contrite heart over sin, and a driving desire to please God. It nurtures humility, a deepening love for God, and a deeply personal, deeply intimate relationship with God. And the point here is that this is the path that advances righteousness – in us as individuals, in us as a local church, and in the church universal.
 2. In contrast to the path that advances righteousness, there is a path that advances unrighteousness. And this path goes from the seemingly insignificant sins to sinning in ways you never imagined when you first started on it. It goes from immature foolishness to deliberate rebellion and prideful self-rule, from having a bothered conscience to feeling justified or numb to the evil you are committing, from being occasionally tempted to feeling like you are addicted to a particular sin's allurements and rewards, from sinning privately to sinning openly, and from seemingly harmless sins to life-destroying sins.

3. Paul describes this advancement of evil here in Romans 1:18-32. So let's begin with verses 18-20.

B. Romans 1:18-20 . . . For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, [19] because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. [20] For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

1. There are five eternal truths in these 3 verses that I want to emphasize because they are an important part of the foundation Paul is laying in these first two chapters. And this foundation will enable us to understand what he says in the rest of Romans.

2. First Truth: Paul begins this section by pointing out that the wrath of God against sin and unrepentant sinners is revealed from heaven. Now we know that the wrath of God is revealed in the Holy Scriptures, in both the OT and the NT, and in the Law as well as the Gospels. However, that God revealed it from heaven is an important point.

a. And Paul's point is this – before any scripture was written, in fact, from Adam and Eve onward, God has made it universally known that the willful, unrepented practice of sin incurs His wrath.

(1) We see examples of this truth in God's dealings with Adam and Eve, Cain, and the world at the time of the Flood – all of which took place before any scripture was written and all which manifest God's wrath against sin.

(2) Now the important point here is not that God's wrath against sin was revealed before any scripture was written, but that it has been, is, and will be the same from Adam and Eve to the time when God puts an end to sin by eternally sealing Satan, his co-workers, and all who have served Satan, in the Lake of Fire.

b. Therefore, just as the righteous in OT times had to live by faith in the same way we in the NT must live by faith, so NT unrepentant sinners will incur the wrath of God just like OT unrepentant sinners did. In other words, and this is the important truth to take hold of, when it comes to God's wrath against sin and unrepentant sinners, it has, in essence, been the same from Adam onward, and will remain the same until sin is defeated.

3. Second Truth: Paul says that the wrath of God is against ALL – not some, not the worst, but ALL ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.
 - a. This is true both generally and specifically in that nations, communities, families, and individuals can experience God's wrath. And though we live in a religious atmosphere that promotes God's grace as the all-encompassing solution for sin and our protection from any severe consequences of sin, God's wrath against sin and unrepentant sinners remains a reality Paul wants us to take seriously. And here are a few reasons why:
 - b. Beginning with Adam and Eve, we see from their experience that the cost of one act of disobedience can be severe.
 - (1) Moving to the flood, we see that God destroyed all but 8 people because of the extent of the universal sinfulness.
 - (2) God included a list of blessings and curses in the Mosaic Law (Deut. 28). There are 18 different blessings for obedience, and more that double that amount of curses for ongoing, unrepented disobedience. Notice where the emphasis is!
 - (3) The book of Judges has numerous examples of God's wrath against Israel's ongoing sin. And yet, as encouragement to repent of our sin, Judges includes examples of God's mercy when Israel repented and called out to Him for salvation.
 - (4) God showed His disdain for Israel's prolonged disobedience under the Kings by having most of the population carried away as captives to foreign nations.
 - c. In NT times, unrepentant Israel suffered under Roman rule, and finally Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed and most of the people who lived in Jerusalem were put to death.
 - (1) Ananias and Sapphira are early Christian examples of God's wrath against sin.
 - (2) Paul warns that if we take the Lord's Supper with known, unconfessed and unrepented sin in our lives, we will experience the discipline and judgment of God.
 - (3) In 1 Corinthians 10:1-12, Paul lists Israel's major sins and God's wrath against Israel as a result of those sins to warn us not to follow Israel's example of sinfulness.
 - d. My point here is that God's wrath is real, it is always costly and sometimes severe. In fact, it always exacts a price no one wants to pay once it comes time to pay it.

4. Third Truth: Sinners don't just sin once and that is the end of it, they progressively get involved in worse sin and progressively lose their inhibitions over favorite sins. For example, sinners slowly move from hiding their sin to sinning openly, from feeling shame over their sin to being shameless, from exhorting others to do what is right to supporting sinners in their sinfulness, and from proclaiming the evils of unrighteousness to supporting at least some sinful ways as right, justifiable, and even better than righteousness.
5. Fourth Truth: God's wrath toward sin and against practicing sinners is not as much against the ignorant or unenlightened as it is against the deliberate, know-better, unrepentant sinners whose attitudes and behavior add to the glorification of selfishness, the justification of sin, and the belittling or despising of righteousness.
 - a. Jesus made this clear when He said that the slave who knows his master's will and does not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, but the one who does not know it, and commits deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few (Luke 12:47-48).
 - b. The point here is that known sin willfully practiced receives greater condemnation and punishment from God, whereas sin, unknowingly committed, though it is still wrong and deserves discipline or punishment, receives a lessor or lighter amount of condemnation and punishment from God.
6. Fifth Truth: God has had and continues to have a system for making His presence, His invisible attributes, His eternal power, His divine nature, and as we have already seen, His wrath against sin and unrepentant sinners, universally known.
 - a. We do not know exactly how God works this system, but it appears He uses such things as our intellect with its ability to think, remember, ponder, and reason, our conscience – which houses an innate sense of right and wrong, the wisdom passed down from previous generations, and through the observable intricacies, variety, and stability of nature.
 - b. Therefore, no one – from the first person to the last – has an excuse for denying the existence of God, for rejecting the authority of God, for living in rebellion against God, and for failing to love their neighbor as themselves. God has created us in such a way that we at least generally know right from wrong, and are able to choose right over wrong.

- C. Romans 1:21-23 . . . For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God (*they did not show Him the humble respect a supreme being deserves*) or give thanks (*did not acknowledge their dependence on Him and that He did for them what they could not do for themselves; nor did they show gratitude for His mercy and care*), but they became futile in their speculations (*they trusted in their opinions, which were based on assumptions and incomplete evidence, thus their thinking produced no useful results*), and their foolish heart (*Jesus said that from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man. Mark 7:21-23*) was darkened (*became more evil and had a stronger desire to do what is wrong*). [22] Professing (*claiming*) to be wise, they became fools (*abandoned good judgment, acted absurdly, and pursued a course contrary to the dictates of wisdom*), [23] and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures (*lowered God to something they could more easily understand and manage*).
1. Note: Paul states two reasons for humanity moving away from God
 - a. First, disrespect for God and His position, or thinking less of God than we ought and disregarding the authority He has over us.
 - b. Second, ingratitude for all God has done, is doing, and will do to promote and protect our earthly good and eternal well-being.
 2. The foundational truth here is this: to whatever degree and in whatever ways we refuse or carelessly neglect to humbly submit to God as our supreme being, and to whatever degree and in whatever areas we are ungrateful instead of thankful, to that degree and in those areas we will choose self over God, earthly security over God's security, worldly and fleshly fulfillment over godly fulfillment, and sin over righteousness.
- D. Romans 1:24-27 . . . Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. [25] For they exchanged the truth of 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 over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, [27] and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with

men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

1. Verse 24 tells us that God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity. Verse 26 says that God gave them over to degrading passions. And verse 28 tells us that God gave them over to a depraved mind. Why? Because they exchanged the truth they knew about God for a lie, worshiping and serving a man-made god instead of the true and eternal Creator God.
 - a. In other words, because they were deliberately turning away from God, He began turning away from them. Because they were intent on doing what they knew was wrong, God stepped back and allowed them to move into greater impurity and sin than they had known or participated in before – even to the point of doing what was sexually unnatural and justifying it in their thinking.
 - b. But this raises a truth that ought to encourage us. God has established boundaries that fence in our evil inclinations so that individually and universally, we can not become as evil as we are capable of becoming in spite of the evil in our heart and the devil's temptations.
 - c. However, when we turn from respecting, worshiping, and being grateful to God and begin to intently and persistently take part in sinful thinking and behavior, God starts stepping back and allowing us to experience the due consequences of our foolishness.
2. Verse 24 gives us God's purpose in stepping back from practicing, unrepentant sinners – it is to allow us to get involved in evil activities that shock our sensibilities, shame us (*so that their bodies would be dishonored among them*), bring new and greater troubles into our life (*the consequences of sin*), and in so doing, bring us to our senses.
 - a. I believe it is important in our day to be aware that the shockingly shameful behavior which is the result of God stepping back is the practice of homosexuality.
 - b. And God's purpose in opening this door is never to promote homosexuality, or any other sin for that matter, but to shame and shock unrepentant sinners back into sensibleness.
3. Sadly, in spite of God's methods to call us back to our senses, humanity in general resisted God then and continues to resist God now. Instead of coming to their senses and repenting, willful sinners continue to move away from God – as is evident in our own day.

- E. If you have ever doubted the progressive advancement of evil, in yourself and in the world, listen to these final words from Romans 1:28-32 . . . And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, [29] being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, [30] slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, [31] without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; [32] and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.
1. Remember, this all started with one sin, one act of disobedience, one moment of discontent, one unchecked desire to have more than they had, one occasion of distrusting God, one failure to live by faith.
 2. And what started out as one sin has turned into ever increasing opportunities to sin, and ever increasing participants in sin, and ever increasing destruction and evil brought about by sin, and an ever increasing public approval of sin to the point that evil is called good and good is treated as if it were evil.

III. Conclusion

- A. The foundation Paul is laying here in Romans 1:18-32 is intended to convince us that sin is heinous and God's wrath against sin and unrepentant sinners is just. And why is sin heinous and God's wrath just? Because sin grows and grows, and it brings ever increasing destruction and death into God's creation, and into your life, and into your family, and into the church, and the community, and the world.
- B. Therefore, it is my hope that after examining these verses today we will have a stronger appreciation for the threat of sin – both within and without, but also that we would have a stronger appreciation for the mercy and grace of God to save us from the penalty of sin, from the power of sin, and from the evil that lurks inside us.