

Session 6

FINDING OUR WAY WITH SEXUALITY

Romans 1:18-32

Memory Verse

They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen.

– ROMANS 1:25, CSB

Finding Our Way With Sexuality

THEOLOGICAL THEME: God has made known what is right through general and special revelation. As a result of the fall, all people commit volitional sin in spite of that knowledge.

In his 2018 book, *Sex in a Broken World*, author and pastor Paul Tripp carefully unpacks the significant differences between God's intention for the divinely created gift of sex and the numerous distorted expressions of that gift that are rampant in modern culture. In a heartbreakingly appropriate assessment of the current sexual climate, Tripp notes:

You don't have to look very far to see that we're in big trouble. The news is littered daily with sex scandals. The content of the tabloids is enough to alert us to the fact that something has gone terribly wrong. It's hard to listen to any cultural discussion of sex that isn't infected with either self-deception or distortion of reality. Sex can't deliver the promise that we think it makes, and it's more dangerous than we tend to think. Sadly, today this beautiful creation of God functions in the surrounding culture like a spiritual solvent eating away at the very fabric of human community. It has perverse power to master your heart and, in so doing, determine the direction of your life. It gives the buzz that you're in control while, at the same time, becoming the master that progressively chains you to its control.¹

Understanding the powerful ability of sexuality to control the formative characteristics that make up society, the need to approach sexuality with a biblical worldview has never been of greater importance. What God created as a gift to humanity has become distorted, being viewed as an end of itself. Consequently, culture has increasingly allowed itself to become fragmented by and defined by sexuality. For the church, then, it is critical to understand how sexuality is addressed by God's Word and what the application of that truth means for daily living.

❓ How would you respond to Tripp’s statement that “you don’t have to look very far to see that we’re in big trouble” with regard to sexuality in our culture? What evidences come most readily to your mind?

❓ Where do you generally see the strongest biblical worldview represented when it comes to sexuality? Would you say that it is rare to find such a view?

❓ How comfortable are you in discussing your views on sexuality when the topic is raised in conversation? How would you describe the tones of those conversations?


In this week’s session, Paul opened his letter to the believers in Rome with an explanation of the seriousness of sexual sin. Paul highlighted the reality of God’s righteous wrath on those who arrogantly persist in deliberate sinfulness, in spite of realizing that this is contrary to God’s design and desire.


1. God’s Wrath on Wrongful Worship (Romans 1:18-23)

The verses that immediately preceded Romans 1:18 spoke to the power of the gospel for salvation, with particular application to the daily living of “the righteous.” The righteous are those who have come to know Christ through the preaching of the gospel. The transition, or lack thereof, between verses 17 and 18 makes the contrast of the experience of God’s presence between the righteous and the unrighteous stark and alarming. Paul moved immediately from the worship and salvation of the believer to the impending wrath of those that “suppress the truth.” Both experiences involve revelation, which is authored by God, but the content of that revelation is markedly different.

Paul’s mention of God’s wrath was a theological problem even in his time. Doug Moo explains, “Since the time of certain Greek philosophers, the idea that God would inflict wrath on people has been rejected as incompatible with an enlightened understanding of the deity. The second-century heretic Marcion omitted “of God” in vs. 18, and many others since would like to omit the verse altogether.”² The severity of divine wrath, if it seemed out of place, would have been due to an insufficient understanding of the God who revealed Himself in the pages of Scripture. His wrath was different from the pettiness of human wrath. According to Robert Mounce, “God’s wrath is his divine displeasure with sin. We call it ‘wrath’ because it shares certain basic characteristics of human wrath. But because it is God’s wrath it can have none of the sinful qualities of its analogical counterpart.”³

The stated recipients of God’s wrath were those that suppressed the truth. The truth that the offenders attempted to suppress was the general revelation of God. According to Mounce, “God, in his creation, has provided sufficient evidence of himself to hold accountable all who reject that revelation. What can be known of God is perfectly clear. God himself made it plain. . . . Disbelief requires an act of rebellion against common sense. It displays fallen humanity’s fatal bias against God.”⁴ The beauty and majestic perfection of God’s creation leaves the rebellious without an excuse.

 Describe a time that you were overwhelmed by some aspect of God’s majestic creation. What aspect of God’s character were you especially aware of during that moment? How did it contribute to your worship of God?

 How would you explain the “wrath” of our loving God to someone? What particular points would you make to show it is consistent with His character? What objections might you anticipate someone making to your argument?

In spite of the magnitude of God's general or natural revelation through His creation, there have always been those who would reject giving God glory in favor of creating their own truth system. As Paul explained it, witnessing the goodness of God's creation, "they did not glorify Him as God or show gratitude." When this occurred throughout the Scriptures, the result was some type of idolatry or wrongful worship. The most glaring example might have been the incident of the golden calf in Exodus 32, in which the Israelites melted their gold and had Aaron, the priest, make an idol for them to worship as their deliverer from Egypt. The tragedy of that event is aptly described by Paul: "their thinking became worthless, and their senseless heart were darkened." The rejection of God's truth invariably left the hard-hearted to satisfy their craving for truth with a lesser glory.

For the Roman believers specifically, Paul zeroed in on the fruition of such darkened foolishness. They exchanged the true and rightful glory of God for a lesser glory of images that they themselves created. Mounce says, "To exchange the one who exists outside of creation, not subject to its inevitable demise, for that which at the very moment is caught in the process of decay indicates the abysmal ignorance of fallen humans."⁵

2. Stubborn Hearts Given Over (Romans 1:24-31)

Verse 24 clarifies the nature of God's wrath for those who worship creation instead of the Creator. According to Mounce, in delivering them over to sexual impurity, God's wrath was shown not be an "active outpouring of divine displeasure but the removal of restraint that allows sinners to reap the just fruits of their rebellion."⁶ The truth of humanity's sinfulness is that there is no sense of neutrality with regard to rebellion. Left to its own devices, humanity will only increase the depravity of the expression of its sin. In this particular case, the expression of sin was sexual impurity and the magnitude of its depravity would only increase. As it did, the men and women that rejected God would actually experience the increasing degradation of their bodies as sin continued to take an increased toll.

The rebellious had already been described as exchanging God's glory for a lesser glory. Now Paul wrote of their exchanging God's truth for a lie. "To turn from God is to head straight for theological and moral bankruptcy. The lie they bargained for led them to worship and serve that which is made instead of the Maker."⁷

Specifically, they began to worship themselves, pursuing their own glory, delighting in their own passion. Tragically, wasting the opportunity to praise He who endures forever, their worship was cheapened as it was given to something already in the process of being degraded.

? What are some ways in which you observe culture worshipping the created instead of the Creator? In those cases, how would you describe the opinion of God held by those that worship the creation?

? How does Paul indicate the self-worship of the rebellious influencing the view of sexuality? What aspect of this expression of sin is strengthened by self-worship? What determines that which is acceptable and taboo?

The manner of God’s wrath is the withdrawal of holy restraint from those that willfully rejected the worship of God, choosing instead to continually pursue wickedness. Mounce says, “The penalty for sin is sin itself with all its inevitable consequences.”⁸ What follows next in Paul’s letter is perhaps the clearest teaching in the Bible on homosexuality. Paul referred to sex with someone of the same gender as “unnatural” and “shameless acts.” This would have been in sharp contrast to the sexual ethic of the Roman empire, which tolerated and, in certain eras, encouraged homosexuality.

The third and final mention of God delivering them over to something was delivering them over to a corrupt mind so that they could only do what was evil. To continue in such rebellion, continuously pursuing greater perversions of God’s design, eventually resulted in the loss of ability to think clearly with sound judgment regarding right and wrong. As a result, “they are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness.” The acceleration of degradation to those repeatedly giving themselves to the pursuit of self-worship was alarming and all-consuming.

3. Volitional Rebellion (Romans 1:32)

Paul boldly confronted the pervasive misperception that once a person came face-to-face with the drastic consequences of his or her sin, he or she would repent, become sober-minded, and devote his or her life to God. Paul made clear that no such moment of awakening would be brought about by the pursuit of rebellious living because the appetite for sin is insatiable. Instead, the rebellious will only become increasingly calloused to the consequence and collateral impact of their own sin, and will also actively seek the downfall of others due to the same sin.

? Why do you think a person's ability to be dissuaded from sin by the consequences of God's wrath decreases the longer he or she persists in that sinfulness? How does their perception of the consequences change?

? In navigating the modern sexual culture, what sexual ethics are promoted today that were not treated that way in the recent past? How do you observe the evidence of such celebration in your regular weekly routines?

The just sentence that those that persist in sin deserve to die did not serve as a significant deterrent for those that habitually pursued particular avenues of sinfulness for a prolonged period. Paul's application to the sexual sinfulness that he had been writing about certainly resonated that truth. As their wantonness gradually and subversively consumed their lives, they were unable to be dissuaded by the consequences. Instead of being warned into repentance, they celebrated all the more heartily when others participated in their own brand of brokenness. It was not that they did not understand their punishment, it was that their wickedness had blinded them to the clear thinking of God's truth. In their self-worship, the sacrifice of more lives for the sake of their own pleasure was a relatively small price to pay.

Conclusion

❓ How comfortable would you say you are in being able to articulate the Bible's teaching on sexual ethics? What passages would you make sure to use? What passages would you make sure to highlight to address the consequences of ignoring God's sexual ethics (other than this one)?

❓ How would you describe the attitude in the churches you've attended toward discussing sexuality as an aspect of discipleship? How have you seen that change over the years? Why do you think that is significant?

❓ What does it indicate to you that so much energy is spent in modern culture defining people by their sexual orientation? How does your identity in Christ war against that? What particular aspect of your life do you want to be known for?

CHRIST CONNECTION: Christ's atoning work extends grace to the repentant. For those who reject His grace, however, only wrath awaits.

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: The truth of God's Word with regard to sexuality equips believers to walk as sources of hope in a world shrouded in the darkness of sexual sin.



FOR NEXT WEEK

Finding Our Way With Technology (Our Mind)

Main Passages

- Philippians 4:8

Session Outline

1. Think on These Things (Philippians 4:8)

Memorize

They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen.

- Romans 1:25, CSB

Daily Readings

- Monday - Romans 12:1-2
- Tuesday - 2 Corinthians 10:3-5
- Wednesday - Galatians 5:1
- Thursday - 2 Timothy 1:7
- Friday - 1 Peter 4:7
- Saturday - Colossians 3:1-2

References

¹Tripp, Paul David. *Sex in a Broken World: How Christ Redeems What Sin Distorts*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2018.

²Mounce, Robert H. *Romans*. NAC. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.