

GOD'S REVELATION; MAN'S REJECTION, PT. 6
ROMANS 1:28-32

How many times in the past few months have you observed something culturally and asked a question something like, "How can that possibly be...what are they/is he thinking?..."

- ✓ I said that when I read some of the opinions that were espoused by our Supreme Court in *Obergefell v. Hodges* this summer.
- ✓ I wondered that when Bruce Jenner was given the Arthur Ashe Courage Award at the ESPYs last year for his journey into transgenderism.
- ✓ I wondered that when I read Friday morning of an 8-year-old boy being charged with the murder of a one-year-old girl when the girl's mother left six children age eight and under alone in a home while she was at a nightclub.
- ✓ I thought that when I read about Italian student Caterina Simonsen who posted a photo of herself on Facebook two years ago with the message, "I am 25 thanks to genuine research that includes experiments on animals....Without research I would have been dead at nine...you have gifted me a future." In response she received death threats and comments that suggested the world would be better off with her dead.
- ✓ And virtually every time I watch a political debate, see a news story on the presidential election, or hear a sound bite from a presidential candidate, I wonder the same thing, "Isn't anyone thinking?"

What we are seeing on a regular basis — and in increasing measure — is the consequence of men's rejection of God. Paul makes clear in Romans 1 that God has revealed Himself to mankind (v. 20), and rather than turning to God, man has rejected God and fashioned his own idols to worship (vv. 21-23). And in turn, God has judged man by turning man over to his sin. In essence God has said, "If it is sin that you want, then you shall have your sin..."

In Romans 1, Paul tells of three consequences of man's rejection of God's revelation:

- ✓ Man is turned over to sexual sin (vv. 24-25)
- ✓ Man is turned over to homosexual sin (vv. 26-27)
- ✓ Man is turned over to a depraved mind (vv. 28-32)

It is this last act of God's condemnation that we will consider this morning. In vv. 28-32, Paul says —

WHEN MEN REJECT GOD, GOD JUDGES THEM WITH UNTHINKING MINDS.

Puritan John Flavel wrote a book entitled *The Sinfulness of Sin*. Just how sinful is sin? How evil is evil? In these five verses we get four glimpses into the sinfulness of sin. Here Paul offers four pictures of how idolatrous unbelievers live who have rejected the revelation of God.

- 1. How Men REJECT God (v. 28a)**
- 2. How God JUDGES Man's Rejection of Him (v. 28b)**
- 3. How Judged Men LIVE (vv. 29-31)**
 - ✓ They are FULL of evil (v. 29a)
 - ✓ They are CONTROLLED by envy (v. 29b)
 - ✓ They are CHARACTERIZED by sin (vv. 30-31)
- 4. How EXTENSIVE Man's Sin Is (v. 32)**
 - ✓ They know God's DEATH penalty
 - ✓ They WILLFULLY sin despite their knowledge
 - ✓ They JOYFULLY encourage the sin of others

1. How Men **REJECT** God (v. 28a)

- In v. 20, Paul tells the Romans that God has revealed Himself generally to all men; God's attributes and power are evident in creation. And in 2:15, he will also say that all men also know the moral law of God in their consciences. Mankind — all men everywhere at all times — is **without excuse** (20b) for unbelief. They have had ample evidence to lead them to submission of God and belief in Christ.
- In verses 21-23, Paul details how these unbelievers turn to idolatry rather than God. They'd rather worship anything in creation or anything they create than God. In v. 28a, Paul tells us *how* that process of idolatry takes place.
 - ✓ **They do not see fit to acknowledge God.** The verb *see fit* is a word that means, "approve." And it generally refers to something that has been examined and tested then approved. So the idea here is that they have seen the character of God (v. 20), they have considered that knowledge and then rejected God. In fact the phrase says most literally, "they did not approve to have God in (their) knowledge." They did not want to think about Him and they did all they could to push Him out of their minds. "They thrust Him out of their circle of acquaintance....They [deliberately refused Him]...They preferred other things to the knowledge of God." [Morris]
 - ✓ What we should particularly notice here is that man's rejection of God is not accidental. It is purposeful and intentional. Paul said in v. 18 that they **suppress the truth** (of God) in their unrighteous living. They are actively and intentionally working to eradicate Him from their lives.
 - ✓ This is John 3:19-20 working itself out in real life.
 - ✓ But that theme of rejection flows throughout vv. 18-32:
 - They "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (v. 18)
 - They did not honor (glorify) God (v. 21)
 - They did not thank God (v. 21)
 - They exchanged the glory of God for idols in creation and of their own creation (v. 23)
 - They exchanged the truth of God for a lie (v. 25)
 - They worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator (v. 25)
 - They (women) exchanged their God-given function for an unnatural function (v. 26)
 - They (men) abandoned their God-given function for ungodly desires (v. 27)
 - And all those acts culminate in this final act of rebellious disapproval in v. 28ff.
 - ✓ They don't approve of God. So apologist Norm Geisler wrote, "It's not for lack of evidence that people turn from God; it's from their pride or their will. God is not going to force anyone into the fold. Love never works coercively. It only works persuasively. And there's plenty of persuasive evidence there." A few years ago we saw that work out in the life of Anthony Flew, a well-known atheist who purported to "convert" to theism. One writer gave this account:

Flew has had to assure former students that he does not now believe in revealed religion. "Even one of my daughters asked if this meant we were going to say grace at meals," he said. "The answer is no."

Flew is also quick to point out that he is not a Christian. "I have become a deist like Thomas Jefferson." He cites his affinity with Einstein who believed in "an Intelligence that produced the integrative complexity of creation." To make things perfectly clear, he told me: "I understand why Christians are excited, but if they think I am going to become a convert to Christ in the near future, they are very much mistaken."

"Are you Paul on the road to Damascus?" I asked him.

"Certainly not."

- So men reject God because they do not want Him. They do not want His sovereignty and authority over them; they do not want to worship Him; they want to worship something of their own creation. They don't even want to think about or acknowledge Him in any way. There is a second picture of how unbelievers (those who have rejected God) live...

2. How God JUDGES Man's Rejection of Him (v. 28b)

- Notice the beginning of v. 28 — **and just as**. With that phrase Paul is making a comparison. In the same way that unbelievers (idolaters) have rejected God, so He has rejected them.
 - ✓ We have seen this word ***gave them over*** before (vv. 24, 26); this is God's active and intentional abandoning them to do the sins they want. The sin they do is their punishment for their sin (and their sin is rejecting God and desiring anything instead of Him).
 - ✓ What is particularly interesting here is that Paul says they are given over to a ***depraved mind***. The word ***depraved*** is from the same root word as ***see fit*** (approve). So Paul is making a little play on words: "They didn't approve of God so God turned them over to unapproved minds."
 - ✓ The sense is that because they rejected God as not worth considering, God delivered them to "a condition in which their minds are fit only to be rejected as worthless, useless for their proper purpose, disreputable." Their minds are dis-abled; their minds have no moral ability.
 - ✓ In fact the word ***mind*** refers typically to reasoning faculty — the ability to think rationally; but it's more than that. It also includes the idea of morality; they are given over to immoral thinking. Because they have perverted their worship, and their desires are immoral and ungodly, they can no longer think in a moral, upright manner; they've lost the ability to think rightly.
 - ✓ And Paul takes it a step further — because their minds are given over to depravity, their bodies can only do ***those things which are not proper***. They think inappropriately, so they will do the things that are inappropriate (and he'll give 21 examples in the next three verses).
 - ✓ This is exactly what Paul talks about elsewhere: Eph. 4:17-19. The culmination of that ungodly thinking is that they pursue perversity with greed. Their minds are so devoid of truth that when they indulge in sin and find it lacking and empty, the only thing they know to do is go back for more (which is the spiritual reason for all the addictions we see in our culture).

- This is what we are seeing in our culture. Look at your favorite news site or newspaper on virtually any day and you will see a twisting or morality that makes you say, “how can they think that way?” How? They think that way because in their rebellion against God He has condemned them to think the way they want; they cannot do anything else.
 - ✓ Now notice also this: while we are still in chapter one of Romans, here is a preview of something we won’t get to for a while, but what you should also be aware of, 12:2. By the mercy of God (v. 1), God changes us so that the very thing which is a mark of God’s judgment — a depraved mind — is what God changes and transforms (v. 2)!
 - ✓ Because the mind is depraved and useless, one of the first marks of God’s salvation in an individual’s life is the ability to think morally and rightly. (Cf. also Eph. 4:23.) We see this theme repeatedly in Paul’s letters: the mind in the unredeemed man is useless and in the redeemed man must be renewed and transformed; he must learn to think rightly (Rom. 1:28; 7:23, 25; 12:2; 14:5; 1 Cor. 1:10; 2:16; Eph. 4:17, 23; Phil. 4:7; Col. 2:18; 1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:8; Tt. 1:15).
- There is a third picture of how unbelievers (those who have rejected God) live...

3. How Judged Men LIVE (vv. 29-31)

- In these verses, there are 21 different attributes or characteristics of the depraved mind. When Paul used the verb **being filled** in v. 29, it is dependent on the main verb **gave them over** in v. 28. So that means that these verses demonstrate all the different kinds of sins to which God made them indulgent.
- There have been various ways to attempt to categorize these sins; at first it just looks like a big long list of sins. NT writers frequently write these kinds of lists (called “vice lists”) to indicate what sinful lives look like (e.g., Mk. 7:20-23; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 6:9-10).
- But it is clear that there are three main divisions in this section (with a few more smaller divisions):
 - ✓ The first four are controlled by the verb **being filled** — and they seem to relate to the kinds of things these people do.
 - ✓ The second group of five are explained by the adjective **full** and are primarily about **envy** and its consequences
 - ✓ The items in the final group of 12 are less related to one another but contain two contrasting lists of “positive” things (seven evils they do) and “negative things” (five good things they do not do).
 - ✓ What is particularly significant to note is the breadth of sin; while sexuality isn’t mentioned in the list (because it was spoken of at length in vv. 24-27), virtually every other category of sin is. When people are idolaters and live for self and reject God, there is nothing they will not do.

- They are **FULL** of evil (v. 29a)

- ✓ **being filled with all unrighteousness** refers to a filling that has happened to them. This reinforces that this is part of the judgment of God. His judgment is to abandon them and when that happens, they are filled up continually “to the brim” with all kinds of unrighteousness. There is nothing right in them; and they cannot stop themselves from being filled up with sin.
- ✓ The word **unrighteousness** simply refers to anything antithetical to God and what is right.
 - This doesn’t mean that every unbeliever does every kind of evil, but it does mean that every any unbeliever is capable of any kind of unrighteousness.
 - “The crimes here mentioned were not of rare occurrence. The heathen were filled with them....Wherever men have existed, there have they shown themselves to be sinners, ungodly and unrighteous, and therefore justly exposed to the wrath of God.” [Hodge]
- ✓ **wickedness** refers to a lack of moral value; they are base and malicious. This is a term that is used for the typical behavior of the demons and Satan (Eph. 6:12) — those who are incapable of anything good and righteous.
- ✓ **greed** is an insatiable desire — even at the expense of harming others (e.g., Mk. 7:22; Eph. 4:19).
- ✓ **evil** refers to a *state* of wickedness and viciousness; it is a mean-spirited disposition of malice. He not only loves evil, but he loves its detrimental effect on others.
- ✓ These four attributes are what fill the minds, hearts, and lives of those who reject God. They are captivated by anything unrighteous; nothing righteous is appealing to them. And they are “full up” with that evil. Is it any wonder they cannot do right or lead morally? Their minds no longer function in the way they were designed to function — the mindless life has become the godless life.
- ✓ There are more attributes of the idolatrous...

- They are **CONTROLLED** by envy (v. 29b)

- ✓ They are **full of envy**. The adjective **full** controls the next five words and indicates that this is what they desire; the principle is similar to Lk. 6:45. The first thing that captures his heart is **envy**. He is not only greedy (v. 29), but he is envious — he wants what is not his. If someone else has it, he wants it; now that might be amusing at times in a two-year-old, but it is **murderous**.
- ✓ The words **envy** and **murder** only differ by one letter and Paul apparently wants us to think of them as linked — murder flows out of envy. Paul’s point is not just that they actually and literally murder others, but that their hearts are murderous — they are filled with anger enough to kill another (Mt. 5:21-22). “Envy reminds us that evildoers are not just one happy band of brothers. There is a divisiveness about evil which sets people apart from one another....[and murder is] the ultimate outcome of strife.” [Morris] Cf. also Js. 4:1ff.
- ✓ **strife** refers to quarrels and arguments that arise out of enmity and hatred.
- ✓ **deceit** is not just “lying,” but taking advantage of others through craftiness and underhandedness.
- ✓ **malice** is a hurtful, mean-spirited attitude. This person enjoys when others experience bad things.
- ✓ And again, this is what idolaters are full of — they are controlled by these sins.

- They are **CHARACTERIZED** by sin (vv. 30-31)

- ✓ This final list of 12 sins is broad and general, but also refers to the characteristics of what these individuals are like — these aren't just sins they do, these are their nature and identity.
- ✓ **they are gossips** = They are “whisperers.” They “pour out poison against [their] neighbor by whispering in the ear.” [Godet] They speak secretly, quietly, and detrimentally.
- ✓ **they are slanderers** = They destroy reputations by misrepresentation. While the gossip whispers, the slanderer shouts from the rooftop; but the victim is defenseless against both.
- ✓ **haters of God** could almost be a theme of this entire section. They want nothing to do with God, they reject Him and despise Him and His authority.
- ✓ **insolent** is a word of violence — in 1 Tim. 1:13 it is translated “violent aggressor.” They intend to insult, humiliate, and hurt others. They are cruel to others.
- ✓ **arrogant** is the one who sets himself above others — even God (Is. 14:12-14). He needs no one; he is superior to all. (And God is against this kind of person (Js. 4:6; 1 Pt. 5:5).
- ✓ **boastful** is a braggart, making false promises so that he can falsely gain something (Mt. 4:8ff).
- ✓ **inventers of evil** are those who are always looking for new and “creative” ways to do old kinds of sin. So while there is “nothing new under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9), yet there are new ways to do sin (fraud has always existed, but internet fraud is new). This one wants to be on the cutting edge of evil. His heart is restless without evil; he is inventive in finding ever more hateful ways to hurt and destroy others.
- ✓ **disobedient to parents** seems out of place. Two ideas to contemplate:
 - Disobedience to parents is more evil than we think. It is no laughing matter; the child who is contemptuous of his father's authority will also rebel against the Father in Heaven.
 - This term can only refer to children still living in the parental home (and likely under puberty); even young children and youth are susceptible to destructive idolatry. Don't be lazy or apathetic when you see disobedience or other idolatries in your children; it's evil. There is a reason why Dt. 21:18-21 proscribed the death penalty for disobedience to parents.
- ✓ **without understanding** are those who are foolish and senseless.
- ✓ **untrustworthy** are those who break covenants and promises. They go back on their word. They have no integrity and honor.
- ✓ **unloving** is someone who lacks tenderness. There is no family love: parents don't love children, and husbands and wives don't love each other. The inner structure of a culture is unstable.
- ✓ **unmerciful** refers to a lack of compassion, pity, and mercy.
- Combine these 12 terms (and the nine preceding) and you have something both remarkable and unremarkable:
 - ✓ Someone has said, “a more depressing catalog of vices would be difficult to find.” [Mounce] This is a horrible list of sins of destruction, evil, and broken relationships.
 - ✓ And yet the list is completely unremarkable because we see evidence of this kind of sin every single day. We are familiar with all these kinds of sins. In fact, Sproul is right when he says:

“Despite the scope of his list, it is only partial. It is merely representative of our corruption. If Paul had enumerated all the sins that the Bible spells out, he could have filled the entire epistle and then some. He gives us a representative list that should be enough to stop every mouth and convict every conscience. Surely there is something on the list that we recognize as a part of our own experience. [Sproul, *Romans*]

- This is what idolatry does; it’s not insignificant. It’s evil in its every manifestation. It’s what all of us were at some point (and what some of us still are).
- There is a final picture of how unbelievers (those who have rejected God) live...

4. How **EXTENSIVE** Man’s Sin Is (v. 32) — This verse is the summation of all that idolaters are:

- They know God’s **DEATH** penalty

- ✓ Paul could not be more clear: **they know the ordinance of God**. Not only have the attributes of God been revealed in creation (v. 20), but they also know about the moral laws of God. Now they may not know Scripture, but they have a conscience that informs them of what is right and wrong (2:15). In fact, as you read through the list in vv. 29-31, virtually every culture would recognize those things as bad and even criminal. That’s the conscience. No man sins in ignorance; he *knows* what is right and true and what is evil and sin.
- ✓ But Paul is also specific about a particular ordinance here — **that** identifies which particular ordinance from God (note that it is a singular ordinance) — **those who practice such things are worthy of death**. He doesn’t mean that everyone knows that all those things are worthy of the death penalty (temporal, physical death). He means that everyone knows that all those kinds of sin leave everyone condemned by God and worthy of God’s judgment and Hell. In their hearts, all men are convinced of Gen. 3 and Rom. 6:23.
- ✓ And even while they know that their sin is worthy of death...

- They **WILLFULLY** sin despite their knowledge

- ✓ **They do the same**. They know that all these things will send them to Hell, but they continue to do them. They engage in all these kinds of sins (and perhaps more).
- ✓ Again, this means that they are without excuse. They are guilty and justly so and they know it. God’s judgment has condemned them to their sin, but that judgment is right because that sin is what they desire and want. They deserve death for their sinful natures, desires, and actions.
- ✓ Would you continue in sin if you knew it would lead to death? You might say, “no,” but the flesh will say “yes,” if it is honest. I asked a man who was living in disobedience to read 1 John and answer two questions: 1) what does 1 John say about you if you continue to sin (“I’m not a Christian and I will go to Hell”); 2) are you willing to continue in sin if that’s what it means? (“I guess so...”). That’s the heart of an idolater; he will willfully sin even if it means Hell. But that’s not the worst of it...

- They **JOYFULLY** encourage the sin of others

- ✓ ***They give hearty approval to those who practice them.*** This is the climax of Paul's condemnation of the pagan idolaters. But some have said, "how can that be worse? Isn't it worse to do the sin than merely to vicariously enjoy others doing it?"
- ✓ Paul's point is that it is the worst kind of sin because it *encourages* others to sin: The commentator Lenski has written, "the worst feature of unbelief is not its own damnation, but its effort to frustrate the salvation of others." [*Colossians...*] And that is exactly what makes this last phrase the worst part of God's condemnation of sinners and the worst part of their sin: they willfully and purposefully lead others to Hell by rejoicing in and encouraging their sin.
- ✓ This has been the tragedy of the days in which we now live: not only has sexual perversity and rebellion against family (divorce and disobedient children) and deceitfulness flourished, but it is embraced and encouraged and cheered — friends encouraging friends to divorce and the embrace of homosexual marriage and the lack of accountability for deceitfulness in political leaders...

CONCLUSION: So what shall we do with such a "happy" message?

- Remember what Paul is doing in this section in Romans — he is demonstrating the need for all men to trust Christ and the gospel, and he does that by exposing the sinfulness of men. And in chapter one he is illustrating the sinfulness of pagan believers. They have rejected God and God has condemned them to their rejecting desires (they would rather have anything than Him).
 - ✓ No one will go to Hell unjustly. Everyone who is there rightly deserves Hell.
 - ✓ Everyone who is in Hell has had an opportunity to see the truth of God (v. 20, 32a).
- This condemnation is not given to compel us to desire that these unbelievers go to Hell; it is given —
 - ✓ to awaken these unbelievers to their need for Christ and for them to turn to Christ
 - ✓ to remind believers of the tremendous work of Christ to save us (for this idolatry was resident in all of us prior to salvation)
 - ✓ to warn all men of the evil of sin. Sin is *never* innocuous. Sin begets sin and it is always evil. Always beware and fight against even the first downward step towards sin. Cling to God.

"Thanks be to God that Romans does not end here. The gospel, the good news, is coming. People who do not care about the good news might care if they digest the bad news first and realize what our Savior has done, what he has saved us from, what he has saved us for, and what he has saved us to. We are saved in order to be conformed to his image, to love the things he loves, and to hate the things he hates." [Sproul]

BENEDICTION: Jude 24-25