

## **The Gospel Will Find a Way Romans 1:16-32**

English journalist Melanie Phillips, in her book, *The World Turned Upside Down*, describes the confusion present in sexuality in the West. What is missing in her analysis is any biblical recognition of how the world went off course in the realm of human sexuality (via Gen. 3). One of the passages that speaks most pointedly to how God's wrath is revealed against sin (ie. human sexuality) is Romans 1:16-32 -preceded and followed by the offer of God's grace.

Paul's argument in Romans 1 unfolds from verse 16: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." Why is the gospel for everyone? Because everyone needs the gospel. Each of us is born in the same hopeless and helpless situation. (v. 18) We "suppress the truth" He's shown us about Himself (v 18). In v 20, we deny He has made Himself clearly known in the universe we inhabit—that "His eternal power and divine nature" are evident all around—and, as a result, we're utterly "without excuse" when we refuse to worship Him or thank Him. When we refuse to know God as He has revealed Himself, we don't give up on worship—we just worship something or someone else. Which brings us to the matter of human sexuality. That's what comes next in God's word. We cannot ignore it or change what it says, for to do so is to believe ourselves instead of God. We are not at liberty to rewrite the Bible to accommodate godless perspectives.

Having broken our connection with the Creator—who made us for Himself—we struggle to know who we are. Our purpose is Him, that is to know Him, to worship Him. When men and women turned from God toward idols, including the idol of self, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves. God gave them up to dishonorable passions. "Gave them up" means to let them have what they want even if it means their destruction. Vs. 24, 26-27

The exchange of the normal, natural function of human sexuality for the contrary isn't the first "exchange." Paul has already described mankind as exchanging "the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things" (v. 23)—the exchange of the Creator God for created idols. We have also "exchanged the truth about God for a lie" (v. 25)—the exchange of knowledge for ignorance. And because we refuse to trust and worship him, God gives men and women up to their "dishonorable passions." He gives them up to something contemporary society regards as an alternative lifestyle but that the Bible pronounces to be an abominable perversion. Idolatry thus leads to immorality—and the immorality gets deeper as it goes. This is where our society is right now.

How did we get here? Reflecting on the past several decades of Western culture reveals a strategy at play among those driving the revolution.

First, there have been efforts to make sure the broader society *sympathizes* with their struggles—both of a personal and societal nature. (And Christians surely ought to lead the world in sympathy, but only of the Christlike sort.)

Second, there was and is a clear desire to *normalize* homosexuality and transgenderism through media and individuals' platforms.

And third, there has been and continues to be a concerted effort to *demonize* those who oppose the revolution. Dissenters will be canceled at a high cost.

We're in this mess because we worship modern-day Baals rather than the living God. The moral squalor and brokenness of our culture is merely the clearest evidence of "the wrath of God" being "revealed from heaven" (v. 18). The actual immorality isn't the cause; it's the evidence. It's what happens when we turn in upon ourselves.

The evidence is all around us. When Paul describes both men and women giving up "natural relations" in favor of those "contrary to nature" (vv. 26–27), he uses the word "natural" to describe the material order as God intended it. Anatomy, physiology, biology—all of them, even without theology—testify to God's perfect plan, the violation of which leads to chaos, sadness, and despair.

Homosexual practice, then, isn't simply an alternative lifestyle. It's rebellion against God: *I will decide who I am, what I am, what I'm doing, and with whom I'm doing it*. It's not the greatest sin, but it's clear evidence of a society's defiance of God. When a culture reaches the place where even manhood and womanhood—gender itself—are deconstructed and reconstructed according to individual agendas, that culture is in deep trouble.

We also see this disintegration on a personal level. When longings are no longer filled by God, who has made us for himself, the longings don't go away. We still have to answer the yearnings of our hearts for peace, fulfillment, joy, satisfaction, and sexual gratification.

So, what do Paul's words about men and women "receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error" (v. 27) mean? When we reject God as the answer to our longings, we don't stand on morally neutral ground. We become, in Paul's words, "consumed with passion." It's a passion that is never satisfied. You get drunk on the lust in an attempt to satisfy the lust, but the lust is never satisfied.

For us Christians, all of this presents a challenge. On the one hand, we're called to refute false ideas—remembering Jesus's warning in John 15:18, that "if the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you"—even as we treat those who hate us with honor. On the other hand, we have this good news to share: Jesus was delivered up to the cross so men and women might be delivered from sin and born again to life everlasting. In Him, broken lives are made new.

Christians ought to approach these folks with grace and truth, as Jesus did with all sinners. (John 1:14, 17) We are not to condemn them nor are we to agree with them. We should say, "We will not revile you or ignore you, and we cannot affirm you. And the reason we won't revile and ignore you is the same reason we can't affirm you: because of God's Word, because of His love, because of His grace, because of His goodness; because of His truth; because of who Jesus Christ is."

In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Paul urged the believers, "Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

If we're clear-eyed and honest, we're all described somewhere in this list.

What's the answer? The next sentence, v 11: "Such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (v. 11).

The hope for all of us is the same hope. And the answer is the same answer: the cross of Jesus Christ. He was given up on our behalf so we might enjoy all the beauty and goodness found in Him. This is what we mean when we say the gospel is for everyone.