

## Dimensions of Depravity – Romans 1:24-32

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. Read Text

#### B. An Alternate Reading

1. According to polls **86%** of adult Americans say they believe in the God of the Bible.
2. I'm curious—how many of you this morning when you went out to get in your car & come to church saw 8 out of 10 of your neighbors doing the same?
3. At work—do 4 out of 5 fellow employees talk about God at break?
4. College students; do 8 of 10 of the students on your campus share your faith?
5. **IF** 86% of adult Americans **genuinely** believed in God, here's the way vs. 24-32 would read as a **description** of modern society . . .

Therefore, because they honor God, He bestows on them self-control & purity. Since they consider their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit they cherish the truth of God & worshipped & served His as the Creator, blessed forever. For this reason, God rewards them with pure & wholesome lives, lived with carefree ease even in their most intimate relations so that all receive in themselves the reward of their fidelity. Because they acknowledge God in all things, He rewards them with a clear & sound mind. And because their thoughts are sound, they always do the thing so that life works. Being filled with righteousness, goodness, generosity, kindness, selflessness, life, health, honesty & kindness—they're gentle in speech, always building each other up, lovers of God, respectful, humble, selfless, inventors of good & helpful things, obedient to parents, understanding, trustworthy, loving & merciful. Since they know & do the will of God, they possess an unsurpassed quality of life that they refuse to hoard to themselves, but in love & concern for the welfare of others they give hearty approval & honor to those who likewise live virtuously.

6. **Question:** Which reading more accurately reflects our modern scene?
7. While we *wish* it was the later that marked our time, it's obvious *what Paul writes* is a more accurate description.

#### C. God's Wrath

1. As we pick it up at v. 24 this morning, we're in the midst of Paul's masterful argument for *why* people *need* the Gospel.
2. He knows before they'll reach out in faith to Christ *as Savior*, they need to know they're lost & in danger.
3. Last week in vs. 18-23, we saw that God's wrath *is revealed* against sin.
  - a. I mentioned *some* of the ways His wrath finds expression –
    - 1) Conviction of sin.
    - 2) Occasional manifestations of God's righteous judgment in history; like . . .
      - a) The flood
      - b) Sodom & Gomorrah
      - c) Plagues of Egypt
      - d) Conquest of Canaan
      - e) Assyrian & Babylonian captivities
  - b. I said we'd see a *more subtle way* God's wrath is being revealed right now, this week.
  - c. We find it in these verses. It's contained in the phrase, repeated here 3 times, "*God gave them up.*"
4. Here's what Paul is saying . . .
  - a. Though the existence of God is something men & women *cannot* get away from,
  - b. Because they're fallen rebels who don't **WANT** to answer to God, they do everything they can to either *deny* Him or *alter* His character into something that places less *demand* on them.
  - c. When they *persist* in their denial of God it eventually gets to the point where God *withdraws* His gracious pursuit of them & let's them have what they want – life without God.
  - d. He "gives them up to" the *consequences* of their foolish & wicked choices.

- e. *That's* how God's wrath is manifested – He let's them have what they want: *Life without God!*
5. That's what these verses *describe*.
  6. Here's the problem – Life *doesn't work* without God!
    - a. He created us in His image *so that* we could enjoy an eternal love relationship with Him.
    - b. The essence of life is knowing, loving, & serving God.
    - c. That's where all our peace, purpose, & power is.
    - d. If we turn from that to something else, there will *never* be *peace*,
      - 1) We'll ever be seeking some other *purpose*
      - 2) And we'll have no *power* to live because our center is wrong.
  7. When man rejects God, the urge to worship, to define himself in terms of something significant & greater, lives on.
    - a. That urge can ONLY be satisfied *by* God.
    - b. Augustine said it this way, “You have made us for Yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”
    - c. Having rejected God, rebel man tries to fill the aching void with lesser things.
    - d. But of course nothing works. So he tries *other* things.
      - 1) Madison Avenue learned a long time ago they could sell lots of stuff simply by putting a “New & Improved” label on it.
      - 2) Man's insatiable thirst for *novelty* is driven by the quest for satisfaction.
      - 3) Mick Jagger & The Stones “can't git no satisfaction” because they're looking in all the wrong places.
    - d. Every new thing man tries does provide an moment of pleasure – but it never lasts.
      - 1) So he either turns to something else,
      - 2) Or he *ups the ante* on his sin – needing *more* to get the same level of pleasure as before.
    - e. This is why *sin is progressive*; it goes from bad to worse.
    - f. Those who've been deep into drugs know how it usually happens.
      - 1) You start with beer & wine, then move on to hard liquor.
      - 2) Then you try marijuana, then club drugs, coke, meth, crack, heroin.
    - g. Sexual sin follows a similar trajectory.

#### D. Corinth

1. This is what Paul describes in this passage – a society that's consistently rejected God, so He turns them over to their sin.
2. He wrote this in Corinth, a city known across the Roman Empire as a center of immorality.
  - a. On the hill above the city was a pagan temple served by a thousand prostitutes, many of whom were male.
  - b. Every evening they dress in seductive clothes & wandered the streets of Corinth, offering both men & women their services.
  - c. It was considered *an act of worship* to the pagan gods to have relations with them.
3. Both homo- & heterosexual immorality was *rampant* in Corinth, along with every other vice known at that time. It was Las Vegas, San Francisco, & Rio de Janeiro all rolled into one.
4. As Paul wrote this, he spoke from the midst of a culture *filled* with the very things he was referring to.

#### E. The Dimensions of Depravity

1. Paul is going to use the phrase; God “gave them up” 3 times.
2. *First* - In v. 24 he says God gives people up to *depraved sensuality*.
3. *Second* – In v. 26, God gives them up to *depraved sexuality*.
4. *Third* - In v. 28 He gives them up to a *depraved mentality*.

## II. TEXT

### A. Vs. 24-25

#### <sup>24</sup>Therefore

1. Because of all he'd said in the previous verses, that people had *rejected* God, **God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts,**
2. They gave up on the knowledge & worship of God, so God gave them up to what they were yearning after.
3. Remember what we saw last week – the problem with rebel man isn't with his *head*, it's with his *heart*.
  - a. It's not that he **CAN'T** believe in God, it's that he **WON'T**.
  - b. His heart is sinful & wants what it wants without having to face the problem of guilt or the fear of judgment.
  - c. This is why people either reject the existence of God outright or why they fiddle with His character.
4. When a person constantly resists the Spirit of God, they run the risk of coming to the place where God says, "Okay. You don't want Me to pursue you in love? **Have your way.**"
5. He lets them go to pursue the evil their hearts long for.

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6. Many years ago, we went on vacation with some friends.
    - a. They had a little girl who was about a year old.
    - b. She had 2 things down cold: crawling & putting **EVERYTHING** she could grab into her mouth.
    - c. If she could chew & swallow it, it was gone!
    - d. Consequently her parents had to keep a constant eye on her.
    - e. They held her but she was forever trying to get away.
    - f. She cried, squirmed, pulled & yelled in her defiant little self-will to get away & go crawling off after something that looked tasty.
    - g. We were at their vacation house & this little girl had managed to escape their attention for a short while.
    - h. She crawled over to the open sliding glass door & sat there, looking outside.
    - i. A little later I looked over again to see her still sitting there in an uncharacteristically quiet way.
    - j. So I went over to check on her & sure enough in her fingers was a big piece of ugly black gunk. Around her mouth was a similar smudge--& she was *chewing*.
    - k. I squatted in front of her to see what she had. It was the goo from the *track* of the sliding glass door.
    - l. So I put my hand to her mouth, reach in & scooped out what was inside; grease, hair, an old cigarette butt & who knows what else. I about heaved.
    - m. Now, here's what's amazing; she was **angry at me** for depriving her of her mouthful of grossness!
    - n. I stopped her because she was a toddler & didn't know any better.
    - o. If when she turned 20 she was still eating from the screen door track, I'd tell her it wasn't a good idea, but I wouldn't stop her.

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7. There comes a point in our rebellion against God when He says, "You're determined to have your mouthful of grease, hair, bugs, & old cigarette bugs? Go ahead."
  8. Because sin is progressive, once man starts down sin's path, unless he repents & turns back to God, it gets *worse* as Paul charts here.

<sup>24</sup>Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup>who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

9. Psalm 8 says that God created man a little *lower* than the angels, who are spirits without bodies.
10. Genesis 1 teaches man is *above* the animals, which have a body but no spirit.
11. Human beings are unique in that they possess *both* a spirit & a body.
12. Because of man's unique position in creation, he can move either *upward* in the spirit or *downward* in the body.
13. Man's body was meant to be the vessel for his spirit as he communed with God.
  - a. His body is best used when it's the vehicle for spiritual life on Earth.

- b. But when man rejects God, the spirit dies all that's left is the body with its desire for pleasure.
14. The **result** of rejecting God is a life **dominated** by the body's demands.
15. And again, since **satisfaction is fleeting**, people keep coming up with new & more intense ways to pleasure the body → Alcohol, drugs, sex, are often just forms of depraved sensuality.
16. In more extreme forms of a depraved sensuality, people realize the pursuit of **pleasure** doesn't scratch the satisfaction itch, so they begin to **dishonor their bodies** as Paul says here, through grotesque practices.
- They **wear** bizarre clothes & hair styles.
  - They **disfigure** their bodies with marks & piercings.
  - Sexual perversion becomes common place.
  - Abortion, euthanasia, infanticide, even genocide become socially acceptable.
  - While these things are in abundant evidence in our modern culture, they're not new.
  - They're signs nearly every great civilization has exhibited in its last days.

### B. Vs. 26-27

<sup>26</sup>For this reason God gave them up to vile passions.

- Here's the 2<sup>nd</sup> thing God gave those who reject Him up to—**vile passions** =
  - Disgusting desires. Shameful longings.
  - What Paul refers to here is the kind of totally sick thought that rises within you that **surprises even you**.
  - It's the kind of thing that's so utterly evil, wicked, nasty if anyone knew you were thinking it, you'd be so embarrassed you'd never go out in public again.
- And yet, there are people who're so spiritually far gone, they've grown **so** hardened, **so inured** to the work of God's Spirit, even these most evil things have become their **delight** & they feel no shame in pursuing them **publicly**.
- Paul is referring to **sexual depravity** here & gives **one of the ways** this depravity manifests itself – in homosexuality.

**For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. <sup>27</sup>Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.**

- Paul uses polite euphemisms for sexual intimacy when he says "natural use." It was a discreet term meaning *intercourse*.

- Now, it's important we understand what Paul **is & isn't** saying here.
- First of all, he's not some kind of raving homophobe who's trying to rally the troops against homosexuals.
  - Living in the permissive culture he did & having had the privilege of leading thousands to faith in Christ,
  - He knew there were people in the churches spread throughout the Empire who'd been practicing homosexuals **before** their conversion to Christ. In **1 Corinthians 6:9-11** he writes . . .

**Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.**

- God created men & women as sexual creatures.
  - There's a proper & holy way for the expression of our sexuality; within the boundaries of marriage.
  - But when people reject God, all of life spins out of control, **including** sexuality.
- What Paul refers to here are people who've rejected God so long & so hard, He's turned them over to the sexual depravity they long for.
- Their view of things has become so distorted there's been a complete reversal in their view of **themselves**.
  - You see, if the only true way to know one's self is to know God, as the Bible says,

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- b. Then rejecting God will ultimately result in the complete loss of one's own self understanding.
10. That's what Paul is describing here – a complete reversal of what God intended in the creation of man & woman as sexual beings.
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11. But his *focus* here is more on a *society* than on individuals. We can see that in 2 ways . . .
- First* – in Greek, he doesn't use the more *personal* words “men” & “women” He uses terms better translated as “males” & “females.”
  - Second* – look carefully, v. 26; “**For even their women . . .**”
12. We can be sure that in his many contacts, Paul had met many wonderful men & women who'd come to Christ from a homosexual lifestyle.
- Like any good pastor he'd talked with them, heard their stories & knew their struggles.
  - He'd no doubt provided counsel to those who battled homosexual temptation.
13. That's not who he's speaking about in vs. 26-27.
14. He's speaking here about a culture that *celebrates homosexuality* as normal when it so obviously is **NOT**.
15. On the contrary, Paul's point is that to consider it normal is a sign God has given a society *over to* sexual depravity.
16. Listen – all one has to do is read a little history to realize that virtually every great civilization *began* with strong prohibitions *against* homosexuality.
- But as wealth, power & decadence grew, so did the push for the *acceptance* of homosexuality.
  - And one of the surest signs a civilization was about to go down was the embracing of homosexuality as not only accepted, but *honored*.
  - Ancient Greece said homosexual love was the purest & highest form of love *just before it fell*.
  - Rome had strict rules against homosexuality throughout most of the years of its ascendancy.
  - But 14 of her later emperors were homosexuals.
17. The same can be said for the ancient Babylonians, Persians, Egyptians, & a host of others.
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18. All this makes our own time & culture that much more troubling.
- In just one generation we've seen the traditional ban on homosexuality replaced by an enforced acceptance, approval & in some cases *preference* for it.
  - States & cities have enacted legislation recognizing homosexual unions & giving rights once reserved for married people to domestic same-sex partners.
  - And in one generation, we gone from the place where when a pastor taught on this subject & called homosexuality a sin, nearly everyone agreed, accepting what was said as a moral given –
  - To a situation where on Oct. 10, 2004, at a tax-payer funded event called *Outfest* in Philadelphia, a small group of Christians showed up to lovingly suggest God could deliver people from the sin of homosexuality.
    - A militant homosexual group surrounded them & began harassing them, pushing some to the ground & tearing up their signs & literature.
    - The police refused to intervene until the militants were done. Then they arrested the Christians, charging 11 of *them* with disorderly conduct – including 2 elderly grandmothers.
    - The list of charges the Philadelphia DA came up with included 3 felonies & 4 misdemeanors.
    - The felonies were *Criminal conspiracy, Riot, & Ethnic intimidation* – a hate crime.
  - If guilty, the penalty was 5 years in the State penitentiary & a \$90,000 fine.
  - The charges were dropped despite the DA's insistence to prosecute.
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- [27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.](#)**
19. There are a host of physical & emotional problems homosexuals are prone to *because* of their lifestyle.
20. But homosexuality isn't the only form of sexual depravity; there are many other perversions & violations of sex.
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21. The consequences for sexual sin well known in the ancient world & are *epidemic* in our day.
- The syphilis Columbus' sailors brought back to Europe from the new world killed tens of thousands.
  - Tine* magazine wrote, "After the ordinary cold, syphilis & gonorrhea are the most common infectious diseases among young people, outranking all cases of hepatitis, measles, mumps, scarlet fever, strep throat, and tuberculosis put together."<sup>1</sup>
  - According to the *American Journal of Medicine* more than half of all people will have an STD at some point in their lifetime.<sup>2</sup>
  - The estimated total number of people living in the US with an STD is over 65 million.<sup>3</sup>
  - Every year, there are at least 19 million new cases.<sup>4</sup>
  - More than \$8 billion is spent each year to diagnose and treat STDs. This does *not* include HIV.<sup>5</sup>
  - 1 in 2 sexually active persons will contact an STD by age 25.<sup>6</sup>
  - With more than 50 million adults in the US with genital herpes & 1.6 million new infections each year, estimates are that by 2025 up to 40% of all men & half of all women will be infected.<sup>7</sup>
  - And this is to say *nothing* of the hideous AIDS pandemic that's so devastating it's leaving entire regions of the globe completely depopulated.
22. But here's a simple remedy to STDs that could effectively end them in one generation – follow God's plan for sex!

### C. Vs. 28-32

**<sup>28</sup>And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind,**

- In v. 24, God gave those who rejected Him up to *depraved sensuality*.
- In v. 26 He gave them up to *depraved sexuality*.
- Here he gives them over to a *depraved mentality*.
- Because thoughts are the seedbed of actions, once the thought-life becomes corrupt, it's inevitable that one's lifestyle will fall apart.
- Life was designed to be lived in the love, worship & service of God.
- If you wrench it off its base, it can do naught but seek after futility. So Paul gives a long list of the kinds of things that come to identify the lifestyle of those who give up God. They . . .

**do those things which are not fitting; = don't work!**

**<sup>29</sup>being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, <sup>30</sup>backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup>undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;**

- I don't need to give illustrations of any of these because we see them every day.

1 Time magazine, August 21, 1972 Volume 100 Number 8 "Teenage Sex: Letting the Pendulum Swing," pp. 34-40

2 Koutsky L. (1997). Epidemiology of genital human papillomavirus infection. *American Journal of Medicine*, 102(5A), 3-8.

3 American Social Health Association. (1998). Sexually transmitted diseases in America: How many cases and at what cost? Research Triangle Park, NC: American Social Health Association.

4 *ibid*

5 Institute of Medicine. (1997). *The hidden epidemic—Confronting sexually transmitted disease* (edited by Thomas R. Eng and William T. Butler). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

6 Cates JR, Herndon NL, Schulz S L, Darroch JE. (2004). *Our voices, our lives, our futures: Youth and sexually transmitted diseases*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

7 Chesson HW, Blandford JM, Gift TL, Tao G, Irwin KL. (2004). The estimated direct medical cost of sexually transmitted diseases among American youth, 2000. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 36, 11-19.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Hepatitis B Frequently Asked Questions. Updated April 1, 2005. Retrieved April 22, 2005 from <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/b/faqb.htm>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Hepatitis B Prevention for Men Who Have Sex With Men. Online Fact Sheet. Updated April 1, 2005. Retrieved April 22, 2005 from [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/msm/hbv\\_msm\\_fact.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/msm/hbv_msm_fact.htm)

8. In fact, what Paul says here has been true in every generation.
9. But he's not identifying general human fallenness here – the clincher is v. 32 . . .  
<sup>32</sup>**who, =** those God's given up to this long list of depravity  
**knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.**
10. Paul speaks of a time when a society *as a whole*, an entire culture has gone so far from God it calls evil, good & good, evil.
11. People not only engage in immorality themselves because they're weak; they've given up on virtue altogether & have long gotten past feeling guilty.
12. Now they *celebrate their sin* & honor those who join them.
13. They're entertained by evil, by the perverse, profane, debauched, & depraved.
14. They make heroes of those who sin boldly & defiantly. They enshrine & honor those who defy God.

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. *Modern Gladiators*

1. What does Hollywood serve up for us in the way of entertainment?
2. What shows on TV are the most popular?
3. We look back & decry the crowds in the Roman Coliseum who cheered the gladiators & wild beasts as they brutally killed one another.
4. Are we any different as we sit & watch a UFC or Prime match?

#### B. *Spectators*

1. I want to end today with 2 brief stories.
2. In the early 5<sup>th</sup> Century a quiet little monk named Telemachus who lived in the Eastern reaches of the Empire decided to visit Rome.
  - a. When he arrived he heard of the great games in the Coliseum & decided to see what all the fuss was about.
  - b. When 2 gladiator began their fatal contest, he rushed from his seat, jumped over the fence & onto the field.
  - c. With the words "Blessed are the peacemakers" ringing in his ears, he tried to separate the fighters.
  - d. Now, the *popular* version of the story says that angry at the intrusion, one of the gladiators stabbed & killed Telemachus.
    - 1) When he fell, a hush came over the coliseum & the spectators, horrified, stood & left, one at a time till the stadium was empty.
    - 2) That, it is said, was the last gladiatorial contest in Rome.
  - e. The *true story* is this: The *spectators were furious* at Telemachus' attempt to halt their entertainment & stoned him to death.
    - 1) His Christian convictions about the sanctity of life were despised by the crowd who demanded a good show for their coin.
    - 2) They came to see death. What matter if a puny monk was added that that day's victims?
    - 3) When word of Telemachus' death reached the ears of the emperor Honorius, he passed an edict ending the games.
3. On June 23, 2007, 27 year old LaShanda Calloway of Wichita was stabbed in a convenience store.
  - a. Surveillance video showed 5 shoppers stepping over her body to finish their shopping.
  - b. 1 shopper even stopped to take a picture of Calloway with a cell phone.
  - c. No one thought to treat her wounds or comfort her.
  - d. It was over 2 minutes after the stabbing that someone finally called 911.
  - e. The paramedics began treatment only 4 minutes later but because of the delay in *calling 911*, the loss of blood ended up costing Calloway her life. She died at the hospital.