

Sexuality Dislocated

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Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason **God gave them up** to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, **God gave them up** to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

Romans 1:24–28 ESV

It has been said, “Whenever we see a ‘therefore’ we must ask what it is there for!”

And so, in the previous verses of Romans chapter 1 (v 18-23) Paul has just shown, *first*, that through creation God is clearly revealed to all humanity—that is, to every individual who has ever lived or is living.

Second, that man’s knowledge of God is so clear and sufficient that we are rendered morally accountable for that knowledge.

Third, that man has suppressed this knowledge of God and become futile in his thinking. Rejecting God as the interpreter of the universe he has contrived an alternate “reality”, therefore believing a lie. In his view, he is now autonomous—the ultimate reference point.

Having explained human rebellion against God and its pretensions of autonomy, Paul now shows the immediate result in the dislocation of human relationships and sexuality (v 24-32). Once man is out of sync with God, he is out of sync with himself. And one of the primary dislocations is in his sexual identity.

Before we deal with the text, the good news is that if we turn to the Lord, there is not only forgiveness but also the power to live a life pleasing to him. He is not unaware of our frailty and failures. With the temptation he will always provide the way out. In Christ there is deliverance!

Nonetheless, while we remain pastorally sensitive to the human condition, we must also deal with the text.

Paul’s letter to the Romans provides the most foundational teaching for Christianity. Unlike the bulk of the Pauline corpus this book is not written to address aberrations, but rather to lay the foundation of Paul’s epochal and unique revelation of the gospel.

The first three chapters establish both the universality of God’s revelation (through *creation* and *conscience*) and of the human condition – both Jew and Gentile – so as to prepare the way for Paul’s revelation of God’s answer through chapters 4 to 11, the remaining chapters (12-16) containing practical issues and personal greetings.

And so, to the text at hand. The sequence of it shows that God is revealed, that man responding suppresses this knowledge in moral and intellectual enmity against God, and that, consequently, his sexuality is thrown out of alignment.

According to Paul therefore, homosexuality is the symptom of a deeper cause rooted in the human condition and God’s dealings with humanity. This is not to minimize the seriousness of same-sex relationships as divinely proscribed (see Lev

18:22; 20:13; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:8-11), but rather to show their true significance.

To exclusively focus on the symptoms is to miss the point; that is, that they are a manifestation of a society with a more profound disorder. The contemporary fight for same-sex marriage and homosexual ordination is exactly that. It represents a seismic shift in our culture.

So, what then is our “more profound disorder”? As a culture the West has rejected the creator-God. She has turned, instead, to created gods—the false gods of humanism, to man as his own ultimate reference point.

Verses 22 to 24 explains:

Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.

Returning to the opening phrase of our text – “*Therefore God gave them up*” – we see that humankind is not only morally culpable for the revelation received, but because of their culpability, they are handed over to the consequences of their choices.

This is in harmony with the covenant arrangement God made with man, first in Adam and culminating in Christ. If the commands of the covenant – “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart*” etc. – are disobeyed, the covenant consequences will then be applied. To be *given up* or *handed over* by God is exactly that. It is a covenant term describing God’s disciplines upon a society that has turned from the true and living God to idols (see Lev 26:25; Acts 7:42).

To cast the fight for the right of same-sex marriage as a “justice” issue can now be seen in its true light. God who *is* the Judge, through the dislocation of homosexuality, is, in fact, judging the culture.

According to Paul then, homosexuality is the result of a society’s rejection of the creator-God and his turning them over to the consequences of their decisions.

How does this work? If we reject the God in whose image we are made – male *and* female (see Gen 1:27) – we implicitly reject gender complementarity, leading to gender confusion, and ultimately to not only the acceptance of same-sex relationships, but also their active endorsement as normative (see Rom 1:32), for example, granting them the same status as heterosexual marriage.

The society that rejects God ultimately becomes narcissistic. Homosexuality is merely the mature fruit of the primeval seduction to become as gods. It is in effect the worship of our own image: male-to-male, female-to-female. And as such is unable to fully reflect the image of God as male *and* female.

Therefore, while the biblical Christian cannot endorse homosexuality, they must see it as merely a symptom. To resist the move toward the institution of same-sex marriage is necessary so as to stand for biblically orthodox Christianity, but it is not the whole story. It is merely a rear guard action.

The strategic action is through the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom of God; through calling a people back to God and to covenant faithfulness.

The cultural West – church and society – is under a discipline of God. The vigorous move toward the endorsement of homosexuality as normative is but a symptom of that discipline.

It is in fact, a penal but redemptive judgment on our culture due to our moral and intellectual defection from the creator-God, and thus biblically revealed Christianity.

These judgments will only be rolled back through widespread personal and systemic repentance as a culture—a changing of our ways through a pulling down of every idol and false god; every false belief system and value system that is not grounded in the true and living God!

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