

# *When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do*

*"My Way Ain't the High Way"*

1:21-32

Warren Wiersbe introduces this portion of Romans by saying, "The greatest judgment God can inflict upon us is to let us have our own way."

We are going to see what happens when, instead of receiving the witness of God, mankind rejects it and God lets us go our own way.

Romans 1:21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

"Although they knew God..." This is a summary of the previous verses which taught us that God has given a witness of Himself to all men everywhere both *externally*, in creation, and *internally*, by putting "eternity in [our] hearts" (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

God's witness is not sufficient by itself for men to be saved by it alone but is enough for men to grope after God, to seek Him, and be found of Him as He sees to it they receive greater revelation of Himself.

Norman Geisler puts it like this: "Someone lost in the darkness of a dense jungle who sees one speck of light should go towards it... If any unbeliever truly sought God through general revelation, God would provide the special revelation sufficient for salvation."

Those who refuse this witness are next described. They first of all "[do] not glorify Him as God." This means that they will not have God rule over them.

That takes us back to the original sinner and to original sin. Satan was the original sinner. In his pride he desired to be like God rather than have God rule over him.

It led to his temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They, too, desired to be like God and in their pride brought original sin into the human race.

Next men become "unthankful." Although God is the source of every good thing men possess, in failing to acknowledge His rule you immediately become unthankful for His resources. In fact, you start to blame God for the state of things.

Men "become futile in their thoughts." Since God ultimately gives everything meaning and purpose, having rejected His rule men must speculate for themselves on the meaning and purpose of life. These various speculations are man's godless reasonings about his own nature and the nature of the universe. One author put it like this:

The mind devoid of God's truth has no way to discriminate between truth and falsehood, between right and wrong, between the significant and the trivial, between the truly beautiful and the monstrous, or between the ephemeral and the eternal.

As he continues to follow his own wisdom "his foolish heart is darkened." The light God has given is overcome by ever increasing spiritual darkness. As Jesus said, "For out of the [darkened] heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matthew 15:19).

Romans 1:22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, "the whole drift towards modernism that has blighted the church... and nearly destroyed its living gospel may be traced to an hour when men began to turn from revelation to philosophy."

Psychology provides a great example. Godless men speculate on the human psyche, on the human condition, on what makes you and I tick. They do all this without reference to the description of man as fallen and in need of salvation. It is proffered as "wisdom" but it can only be foolishness.

Romans 1:23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man; and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

Man in his own wisdom still tries to fill the "eternity in his heart" with worship. He invents his own religion. Man becomes an idolater. He fashions gods to resemble himself, then settles for gods in the image of lesser creatures.

By the way, historians verify an important fact. Ancient cultures begin with the worship of one god and only later begin to worship many gods.

- Herodotus, the famous Greek historian of the 5th century BC, said that the earliest Persians had no pagan temples or idols.
- The 1st century Roman scholar Varro reported that Romans had no animal or human images of a god for 170 years after the founding of Rome.
- Lucian, a 2nd century AD Greek writer, made similar statements concerning early Greece and Egypt.
- The 4th century Christian historian Eusebius declared that "the oldest peoples had no idols."

This is just what you would expect from Paul's analysis, and it is exactly the opposite of what the Theory of Evolution would and does predict.

Man's worship is a wreckage; so is his wedlock. Wedlock is the pledge of marriage within God's blessed boundaries. This most cherished of a loving Creator's purposes for His creatures is in global wreckage today, just as described in these verses:

Romans 1:24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,

Romans 1:25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

The "truth of God" Paul seems to be referring to is the sanctity of marriage. I say that because the discussion here, about sexual perversions, depend upon there being a standard, a measure, for proper sexual expression.

And it's clear Paul was thinking about the Garden of Eden because he refers to their believing "the lie," a reference to Satan's temptation.

God's first commandment to Adam and Eve was "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). What He meant by that is stated in Genesis 2:24, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Monogamous, heterosexual marriage was God's purpose and wisdom for His creatures. It should be no surprise, then, that once His creatures have rejected His right to rule them that monogamous, heterosexual marriage gives way to the perversions listed here.

You are told "God gave them up." This doesn't mean that God gives up on mankind; it means that He gives mankind *over* to the inevitable consequences of their decision to reject His rule and to rule themselves. He gives mankind *over* to what they desire, but then they must bear the awful consequences.

From the sanctity of marriage they are given over to "uncleanness in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves." Because of the discussion of homosexuality that immediately follows we tend to overlook that **this** verse is likely referring to heterosexual perversions of the sanctity of marriage. Fornication between unmarried men and women, as well as adultery by those who are married, are just as sinful as what follows. The fact that these are so common in society so as to no longer shock us does not change their perverse nature.

There is then a discussion of homosexuality.

Romans 1:26 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.

Romans 1:27 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.

The verses speak for themselves. All male and female homosexuality is "vile," "against nature," a "burning lust," and is "shameful."

It's interesting to note Paul wrote to a culture where homosexuality was accepted as a part of life for both men and women. For some 200 years men who openly practiced homosexuality, often with young boys, ruled the Roman Empire. At times the Roman Empire specifically taxed approved homosexual prostitution and gave boy prostitutes a legal holiday. Legal marriage between same gender couples was recognized, and even some of the emperors married other men.

Does Paul single out sexual sin, and especially homosexuality, because it is the worst sin? Or because once a society gets there it's through? Probably not, because there are other sins which are just as bad. C.S. Lewis shares this insight.

If anyone thinks that Christians regard unchastity as the supreme vice, he is quite wrong. The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. **All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual...** A cold, self-righteous [person] who regularly goes to church, may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But of course, it's better to do neither.

Why, then, are these sins singled-out? It may be because they are so obviously unnatural that they illustrate the extent to which men devolve apart from God.

Fornication, adultery and homosexuality are sins. To say that this is an antiquated view, that we know better now, is exactly the kind of 'professing to be wise when we are fools' that Paul was talking about. Acceptance of these behaviors isn't something to be proud of, as if we are smarter than our ancestors. It's something to be ashamed of because we have become more foolish.

It's actually good news that they are sins because it means you can be forgiven and delivered from them. Listen to this passage from First Corinthians 6:9-11.

1 Corinthians 6:9 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,

1 Corinthians 6:10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 6:11 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.

Do we think “thieving” is something you are born to do? Do we think that “coveting” should be legalized? Is “extortion” to be expected? The Bible puts sexual sins and drunkenness in this same category.

Some of the Corinthians had been homosexuals and drunkards, etc. Not anymore! They had been “washed... sanctified... justified.” **They got saved!**

It says here that those who commit sexual sin receive "in themselves the penalty of their error which was due." Do you realize that there would never have been sexually transmitted diseases if mankind had followed God's purpose for marriage?

In rejecting God men pervert their worship and their wedlock. Paul now describes the resulting wantonness of their society. When you give up God and give up God's way of founding your society on biblical marriage, these are the results.

Romans 1:28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;

Romans 1:29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers,

Romans 1:30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,

Romans 1:31 undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;

This is a perfect description of our contemporary society. You could take anything listed here and list statistic after statistic to verify that our society is increasing in these things with no end in sight.

As a final indictment Paul says in verse thirty-two,

Romans 1:32 who, 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.

Here is something else all men everywhere for all time are said to "know" - they know that these behaviors are deserving of punishment by God Who is revealed to them in creation. Nevertheless they "did not like to retain" this knowledge of God. They willfully reject all that God has revealed to them, rather than responding to it.

"Do the same" doesn't mean behaving exactly the same way. It's talking about having the same attitude of pride regardless the specific manifestations in behavior. It's like the C.S. Lewis quote. Those whose sins are spiritual "do the same" as those whose sins are fleshly.

Worse than the activities of wantonness is the attitude of a society in approving of it. Now you most often hear this applied to sitting in front of your TV set or going to a movie to be entertained by activities that are ungodly.

I'm not defending that but let's get real. If that were the case, you wouldn't be able to read large portions of the Bible! We do need to be careful regarding what we watch and expose ourselves to. But I always think of it in terms of *intent* as well as *content*. In other words, some of the content portrays evil behavior, but what is the intent? With the Bible, the intent is to reveal the grace of God, the mercy of God... things like that.

A better understanding of this verse has to do with society passing laws that condone these activities, giving approval to them. We've done that in America and we will, as a populace, continue to do it until we return to God.

It's right to oppose homosexual marriage. Just realize that we've already passed laws legalizing or at least condoning and giving tacit approval to many other sexual sins. I am admittedly naive when it comes to both the law and politics, but it seems to me that no-fault divorce gives tacit approval

to adultery. Adultery doesn't really factor in to the legal dissolution of marriages.

A 'win' by stopping homosexual marriage is good but we're already pretty far into the perversions listed here.

I'm not against fighting our devolution as a society on the level of the laws we pass. Just don't forget that the political fight doesn't deal with the root issue. We must be about the sharing of the gospel so that what we can say to folks, "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."





