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Sin's Downward Spiral

ROMANS 1:24-32

Introduction

1. Would any of you here this morning consider yourself a stubborn person?
2. Are you typically determined to do something your own way regardless of what others may say?
3. Would any of you who are parents say you are raising or have raised a stubborn child?
4. Have you ever said to that child, "Okay, have it your way," and then waited for them to experience the consequences of their own choices?
5. This is what God does when He gives someone over.
6. In the Old Testament we find God giving Israel's enemies over to His people for their intentional destruction:
 - a. At Mount Sinai, as God through Moses was telling the Israelites about their conquest of the promised land, He said, in Exodus 23:31, "I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River Euphrates; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you." (Exodus 23:31, NASB95)

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- b. Forty years later, in the plains of Moab, just prior to crossing over into that promised land, Moses said of God, "But the Lord your God will deliver them before you, and will throw them into great confusion until they are destroyed. "He will deliver their kings into your hand so that you will make their name perish from under heaven; no man will be able to stand before you until you

have destroyed them.” (**Deuteronomy 7:23–24, NASB95**)

7. At other times, however, we find God giving Israel over to her enemies because of her unfaithfulness:

- a. In Leviticus 26:25, again at Mount Sinai, God defines for His people one of their consequences should they choose to disobey Him:

“I will also bring upon you a sword which will execute vengeance for the covenant; and when you gather together into your cities, I will send pestilence among you, so that you shall be delivered into enemy hands.” (Leviticus 26:25, NASB95)

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- b. In Judges 2:14, when we find the Israelites forsaking the Lord and beginning to follow the false gods which the people around them worshiped, we find these words:

“The anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies.” (Judges 2:14, NASB95)

- c. A number of years later, in Judges 6:1, we find again, that “the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord gave them into the hands of Midian seven years.”

8. Three times, here at the end of Romans 1, we find Paul writing of God giving people over to the logical consequences of their choices.

- a. “God gave them over (up) in the lusts of their hearts to impurity” (v. 24).
b. “God gave them over (up) to degrading passions” (v. 26)
c. “God gave them over (up) to a depraved mind” (v. 28)

9. I would like for us to consider three questions as we look at what the apostle Paul has written here.

- a. Why does God do this?
- b. What does it look like when He does?
- c. How can we avoid such consequences in our own lives?

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I. God Gives Us Over To Impurity

A. THE REASON: WE EXCHANGE THE TRUTH OF GOD FOR A LIE

“For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” (Romans 1:25, NASB95)

1. As we saw last week in the verses prior to this here in Paul’s letter to the Romans, it all begins when we choose to “suppress the truth about God” which is “plain” to us because God has “shown it” to us throughout His creation.
2. Again, it was David who declared:

“The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky proclaims the work of His hands.
Day after day they pour out speech;
night after night they communicate knowledge.”

(Psalm 19:1–2, HCSB)

3. However, we suppress this truth and exchange it for a lie — there is no God, we are simply the result of chance.
4. We then begin worship the creation rather than the Creator Himself.

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B. THE RESULT: WE DISHONOR OUR BODIES

“Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.” (Romans 1:24, NASB95)

1. Ultimately, God gives us the desires of our hearts.
2. Throughout the history of the world, idolatry, the worship of images mankind has created leads to sexual impurity.
3. According to Paul, this idolatry resulted in “the degrading of their bodies with one another” (v. 24).
4. He is right.
5. Whenever we engage in any kind of sexual behavior outside of what God intended, we degrade ourselves.
6. However, if as God intended, we hold marriage in honor and keep the marriage bed undefiled (cf. Hebrews 13:4), our lives are blessed.

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II. God Gives Us Over To Degrading Passions

A. THE REASON: WE EXCHANGE THE NATURAL FOR THE UNNATURAL

“... for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.” (Romans 1:26b–27a, NASB95)

1. The next part of our downward spiral is that God gives us over to degrading passions.
2. He does so because we in our suppression and perversion of the truth have turned to exchanging the natural for the unnatural.
3. He points specifically to lesbian practices (v. 26) and male homosexual practices (v. 27).
4. Most of our translations have the words “women” and “men,” but the words which Paul used in the original Greek are the words for “female” and “male.”

5. In both cases he states that the “natural” is exchanged for “that which is unnatural.”
6. Some have wanted to take these two terms “natural” and “unnatural” and interpret them as what seems natural or unnatural to them.
7. The Greek word translated “natural” means God’s created order.
8. “To act ‘against nature’ means to violate the order which God has established, whereas to act ‘according to nature’ means to behave ‘in accordance with the intention of the Creator’.”¹

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9. In his first letter to the saints in Corinth, another city in Paul’s day known for its immorality, he wrote these words:

“Or 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 effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9–11, NASB95)

10. Some of the Christians in Corinth were previously homosexuals, thieves or drunkards, but they were washed of those sins and set free from the stain they left upon their souls.
11. In the beginning, God created humankind male and female.
12. He instituted marriage as a heterosexual union.
13. What God has thus united, we have no liberty to separate.

Slide 8**B. THE RESULT: WE PHYSICALLY EXPERIENCE THE PENALTY OF OUR ERROR**

¹ Richard B. Hays, ‘Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Reponse to John Boswell’s Exegesis of Romans 1’, *Journal of Religious Ethics*, Spring 1986, pp. 200f.

“... receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.” (Romans 1:27b, NASB95)

1. Christians in Rome simply had to look around themselves to see these sins practiced in Rome.
2. Fourteen of the first fifteen Roman emperors practiced homosexuality.
3. It is estimated that the early AIDS epidemic killed tens of millions of people globally.
4. There may be some of you here this morning who lost a friend to this epidemic during those early years.

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III. God Gives Us Over To A Depraved Mind

A. THE REASON: WE NO LONGER ACKNOWLEDGE GOD

“And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer . . .” (Romans 1:28a, NASB95)

1. One English translation renders this as “they did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God” (HCSB).
2. To put it another way, “they put God out of their minds.”
3. So, God gave them over to a worthless or unfit mind.
4. Because they rejected God, God rejected their mental attitude.

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B. THE RESULT: WE DO THINGS WHICH ARE NOT PROPER

“... God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;” (Romans 1:28b–31, NASB95)

1. If we reject God to the point that He gives us over to a depraved mind, we will find our mind so debilitated and corrupted that it is no longer a trustworthy guide when it comes to our moral decisions.
2. Such a mind leads to a whole list of practices which “ought not to be done” (ESV) because they are “morally wrong” (HCSB).
 - a. The first four in Paul’s list are general sins with which people have become “filled”: “all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil.”
 - b. Next are five more sins of which people may become “full”: “envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice”
 - c. The next two, “gossips” and “slanderers” were referred to by one translator as ‘whisperers-behind-doors’ and ‘stabbers-in-the-back.’
 - d. Then there are four more which portray different forms of pride: “haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful.”
 - e. These are followed by two more which signify people who are ‘inventive’ when it comes to evil and rebellious when it comes to their parents (v. 30b).
 - f. Finally, Paul adds “without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful” (v. 31) which one translation lists as “without brains, honor, love or pity” (New Jerusalem Bible, 1985)

Conclusion

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1. In the last verse of this chapter, Paul provides us with the depth of depravity to which a person the sinful mind will ultimately take us:

“Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.” (Romans 1:32, ESV)

2. Here is perhaps the saddest statement of all — these people not only know God's truth but also His "righteous decree" which is "those who practice such things deserve to die."
 - a. Paul will later write in this letter, "the wages of sin is death" (6:23).
 - b. These people know this.
3. However, it doesn't affect the way they live.
 - a. They continue to do the very things which they know will bring their eternal death.
 - b. They flagrantly "approve" of these evil practices when they see them in others.
4. I encourage each of you to hear what Paul has said to us this morning.
5. If we suppress and pervert the truth, we will also find ourselves living a depraved lifestyle.
6. This will result in God giving us over to the consequences of our choices.

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7. A number of years ago, Palmer Wheeler penned the words these words that many of us have sung:

Today is the day of salvation,
Tomorrow may be too late.
There's danger and death in delaying,
Accept God's saving grace;
His life on the cross He has given,
O come while yet you may,
He's earnestly pleading,
Oh make no delay,
Tomorrow may be too late.