How Could God Allow "this" to Happen?
Romans 1:24-32

This week I got my wood delivered for next year. I buy it cut, split & delivered (congratulations to those who buy it log length or get it from your woods). I have used the same local family to provide my wood for over 35 years. And for at least the last couple decades, the same family member has delivered that load of wood -- interestingly at about the same time of the day – 4 pm. So he & I usually have more of a conversation than just, "dump the load there" and "here is your check" – even when it is raining as it was this week. Nothing planned, I simply ask some questions to find out how he is doing and what is happening in his life. More often than not, a profound question, comment or thought will come up in an otherwise surface conversation. This year it was "How could God allow such-in-such to happen in our culture?" I have heard that question many times before from a wide variety of people in a wide variety of situations – you probably have too – in fact, many of us have probably thought it ourselves – in frustration and exasperation we cry out "why this God, why now?". I’ve discovered that in most cases the person isn’t really interested in an intellectual reason – even if that reason is the true cause. In those situations we are looking for something different. We don’t realize it but we are looking for something that will break through our false expectations or false way of thinking that is deceiving us. We need something to break through our own natural deception, but we’ve already sealed off our mind to a direct answer. So my simple reply was a question, "Why shouldn’t He have allowed this". After a pause I added, "How else is He going to get through to people who aren’t listening to Him?" “Maybe we need to learn something we can’t learn any other way?"

PROPOSITION: Whether we are using God given desires outside of His limits or doing what He has forbidden or intellectually excusing doing what is wrong, God loves us too much not to

I. What we know about God (Romans 1:1-23 review)

We are continuing our study of the first three chapters of the book of Romans. Today, we are going to focus on the final verses of chapter 1 – verses 24-32. Let’s start with a quick reminder of what we have already learned in the first 23 verses of chapter 1.

A. A powerful God exists who created the universe and life itself

God has provided clear evidence through the natural world around us, and the details of life itself – that there is a powerful God who exists who created & sustains both life and this universe. The universe could not have popped out of nothing. There is too much complexity needed within even the simplest single living cell for life to just spontaneously happen from non-life. And the complexity of our human abilities, & the self-sacrificing virtues we promote, could not have come from time, chance and the survival of the fittest alone.

B. This true God has taken the initiative to offer us “good news” (the gospel) through Jesus Christ’s death on the cross for our sins and His bodily resurrection from the dead.
This true God has taken the initiative to reach out to us with "good news" through Jesus Christ’s death on the cross for our sins and His bodily resurrection from the dead. "Good news" is what the word "gospel" means. Even though we fall short of the righteousness needed for heaven, God offers us His righteousness. Even though our sin has wreaked havoc in God’s creation, deeply hurt others and messed us up, Jesus offers us forgiveness through His death on the cross to pay the penalty of our wrongs. These wonderful gifts AND a genuine, restored, personal relationship with God are offered freely to all who will put their trust and faith in Jesus.

C. We have chosen not to glorify this true God, thank Him for what He gives us, or held to His truth

But humanity has chosen NOT to naturally glorify the true God or regularly thank Him for His many gifts as He deserves. We don’t believe God’s way (as revealed in the Bible) is the best, so we chose to do what we want, when we want and how we want. In simple terms, we humans have this tendency to elevate ourselves and our own understanding above the Creator & Sustainer of the Universe. In the process we act counter to God’s ways and suppress His eternal truth. This leads to our thinking becoming futile, our inner self becoming hardened against the Lord and elevating created & temporal things above the One True God who offers us eternal and abundant life. As Martin Luther said, “Whatever your heart clings to and relies on is your god.” That is our idol!

D. God loves us too much not to awaken us to the truth we don’t want to hear

We become like that house guest who freely takes the free room & board, but is not grateful, doesn’t help out, expects to be waited on and thinks the household rules shouldn’t apply to them. Their actions & attitudes hurt others, damage relationships and corrupt character – not to mention making home-owners lives much more difficult. God loves humanity too much not to awaken us to the truth – truth we don’t want to listen to! God is God, not us and His way is the only way to an eternal, abundant life. Since we haven’t listened to God’s revelation, or responded rightly to His care & gifts He is going to apply some “tough love” to give us a chance to turn from our sin. The words repeated 3 times in v 24-32 are “God gave them over to...

- READ v 24a. The reason for this – the “what is it there for?” is what we learned in v 21-23 – people don’t glorify or thank God as we should and they worship or endlessly pursue created things instead.
- READ v 26a. The reason for this is the same. The words “because of this” in V 26 refers NOT to v 24, but to v 25 which is a restatement of v 21-23 – exchanging the truth of God for a lie and serving physical things.
- READ v 28a. The word “furthermore” in v 28 explains more ramifications of exchanging the truth of God for a lie and serving physical things. Each of us here feel the temptation to do one or more of the items listed in v 29-31 like greed, envy, deceit, gossip, boasting, lacking love or mercy.
To “give over” is to abandon people to the consequences of their own actions. It is to stop providing certain gifts or benefits or special protection for people. At a certain point, God allows men and women to go as far down the path of sin as they desire. He removes His restraining power. It is what we see the Father do, in Jesus’ parable of the wayward son. When the younger son insisted on leaving, the Father let the young man go. I am sure for months, if not years, that son had displayed his disdain for the Dad’s values, argued against the importance of work for a meaningful life and didn’t keep or appreciate the Dad’s rules. So the Father let this young man take the family’s hard earned money to live the life the son thought would be the best, even though the Father knew the son would waste that money & end up in worse pain. The happiness the son sought didn’t last long, none of his new partying friends stuck by him and he ended up in a far, far worse situation – having absolutely nothing & needing to eat food given to the pigs. Why would God give a person, family or culture over to this kind of thing? He does it because when darkness prevails – when despair and violence are widespread – that’s when men and women are most ready to come to the Light and submit to the Truth. The Lord gives humans up, so that in their despair they might give themselves over to His grace and good news which they were not willing to do before. Let’s now look at three areas where if we insist on going our way, in time, God will stop trying to block us from doing them and will instead release us to go our own way.

II. God gave them over to “sinful desires of their hearts” Romans 1:24-25

A. Using desires in wrong contexts

The first area God hands people over to is the “sinful desires of their hearts”. READ v 24. These ‘desires’ come from the heart – not our physical thumper that pumps blood but our inner-self deep within us. These are strong desires – they are desires we think we need to act on or we will miss out on life, joy and significance. Here, sexual immorality is specifically highlighted, that is having sex outside of marriage. When we go the opposite of what God says, our actions create their own penalty. To turn from God is to head straight for some kind of relational, spiritual, moral or physical bankruptcy. Any lie we choose to make “truth” will lead to pain, unintended consequences, a harder future and spiritual bankruptcy.

B. Human physical sexual relations are for marriage

Now the allure and pleasure of sexual relations between a man and a woman is something God designed and incorporated into our physical human bodies. Physical sexual activity is not bad, it is a gift of God – in fact it is a holy gift of God. So much so, that the book of I Corinthians says it would be wrong for a husband or a wife to cease sexual relations except for mutually agreed upon short times. So the desire for sex with someone of the opposite gender is God given, but God also said it should only be done in a lifetime committed marriage between one man and one woman. So this first major problem area we willfully exchange the truth for a lie is when we take a God-given desire and want to use it outside the context God has ordained for it.
Sex with someone not married, sex with a person that is not your spouse, sex before marriage, sex with multiple people, selling your body for sex, no-commitment sex, watching someone else have sex, pornography, erotic novels – the list is long. Our current American culture rejected God’s wisdom & instruction about sex & marriage many decades ago when the “sexual revolution” started in the late 1960’s (by the way it has happened at other times in our country’s history. Back in the 1790’s the unwed pregnancy rate was over 30%, which we only exceeded like 10 years ago. Out of that morally wayward time came the Second Great Awakening and radical societal change back to Judeo-Christian moral values). Now, are there any evidences that this exchanging God’s truth for a lie has brought major problems? After 45 years of “sexual freedom” the evidences are all around us.

- Sexually transmitted diseases continue to be rampant,
- Overall sexual satisfaction of those married is higher than those living out the media’s sexually permissive messages,
- A surprisingly large number of those who heartily embraced the “sexual revolution” in their younger years now wish they had acted differently. Disobedience to God’s sexual rules didn’t lead to what they thought.
- Kids are drastically impacted in negative ways as divorce & living together have skyrocketed unbelievably since the sexual revolution started.
- Living together before marriage doesn’t lead to stronger marriages as popularly claimed but actually increases the divorce rate to almost double those who don’t live together before marriage.
- The development of deep intimacy between a couple is hindered when sex in introduced before marriage. Besides procreation, sex in marriage is meant to be a unique glue for that relationship. Because the physical hormonal effect of physical sex is so strong, when it happens before marriage, it blunts the progress of intimacy in all other areas of a relationship, so we think we are “more in love” & more committed than we actually are.

God’s ways are always for our long term good, the long term good of others and the good of the greater group we are part of. Do we believe this? That will determine whether we want to follow all the Lord’s ways or not. There is a lot of good God wants to bring into our lives by holding off having sexual relations until marriage. And there is a lot of unnecessary pain & problems He protects us from when we listen. If we don’t listen, God loves us too much not to try to wake us up to the real truth and see the lie we are believing for what it really brings.

C. v 25 rephrases v 21-23

READ v 25. How can God allow “this” or “that” to happen? Sometimes it is to wake ourselves or our culture up to the lies we are acting on – lies that will hurt us. God wants to us to experience spiritual wholeness, lasting love and a positive future. That can’t happen as long as we insist on using God given desires in areas God says not to.
A. Strong desires that should never be acted on

The second area that God hands people over to is "shameful lusts". READ v 26-27. These actions are from strong desires that rise up in a person which God doesn’t ever want us to carry out in any context. The particular example focused on here is physical sex with someone of the same sex—a woman having sexual relations with another woman or a man having sexual relations with another man. While some in our day will try to claim these verses are not against modern LGBT sexual relations, you can’t get clearer than what is said here. It is not just against man/boy sex or the word “natural” should be taken “natural for me”. God does not want any human to sexually act on any homoerotic passion they feel. If you want more detailed listing of the many different false claims and clear answers from these verses, I’ll be glad to e-mail you a couple of book summaries reporting on ~1,000 pages dealing in depth with each modern day claim made. Bill Wick compiled this work a number of years ago and even his summaries end up being over 100 pages – too many to print.

In contrast to Jewish society, the Greco-Roman society of Paul’s day easily tolerated homosexuality—especially the upper classes. In fact, some advocates viewed homosexuality as superior to heterosexuality. Rather than appealing to God’s clear commands in the Jewish law, Paul focuses on biology and the design of our human bodies. Both male and female homoeroticism are opposite of our natural design. Now if we say that in our current culture we are branded a hater, bigot, intolerant and lots more. But if we really understand the devastation of putting our thoughts and emotions as our gods, we all should have great compassion on those who have strong LGBT desires in them. For their own good, God asks them to trust Him that what is best is to abstain from carrying out those desires. When Christine committed her life to Jesus here at BEFC, she went on to leave her lesbian lifestyle. It was she who said what she thought she wanted so badly most in her life actually enslaved her, and coming to Jesus and trusting Him that she needed to leave those actions were actually freeing for her! Last month, I out a news article in the bulletin about Jamie Shupe who lived as a transgendered woman for many years then in 2016 became the first legally non-binary person in the US. None of those actions helped the cry deep inside him. Shupe says he didn’t need affirmation from the medical community. He needed help. We can be there and we can be a help when those with LGBT desires find that pursuing those actions hasn’t helped the deeper need inside. But we can’t do that if we see those LGBT desires as any different than the desires you and I have in our own lives which God asks us NEVER to act on. Can you identify your own shameful desires—strong desires we have which God never wants us to carry out? Sometime can grow out of one of those desires, but for the vast majority of us, we will have to struggle against at one shameful all or most of our lives. That doesn’t make them natural or right. But it also means we aren’t very understanding if we think people should not have those desires or that if they pray, they will just go away. All of us have shameful desires of some kind—and God works greatest when we fight giving into those.
B. “Out of biological design” physical sex is always wrong

C. There are built in consequences

The end of v 27 again reminds us that there are built in consequences to carrying out our shameful desires no matter what area they are in. We don’t have to convict the LGBT community of the shame. That is God’s job – that is why He releases those who have rejected his inner conviction to pursue what will actually hurt them because they haven’t listened to His other messages. Our job is to genuinely believe God’s ways are the best so when some get to the end of themselves they are ready for a massive dose of God’s grace. Don’t despair with what is becoming popular around us. This is when & how God reaches in to the hardest of hearts and does the greatest transformation.

IV. God gave them over to “depraved mind” Romans 1:28-32

I’ve noticed some heterosexuals at this point congratulate themselves that they haven’t engaged in the sexual immorality or homoerotic sex mentioned in v 24-27 even though they do have desires they use in the wrong way and do have desires God NEVER wants them to act on. So we are given a third area which is hard to avoid where God hands people over to experience the tyranny of their own sinful behavior. READ v 28. This time people are handed over to a “depraved mind.” (note spelling error in the outline – it is depraved not deprived.) The first word “Furthermore” confirms what comes out of a depraved mind is actually worse than homosexual or lesbian acts just mentioned.

A. Doing what ought not be done

So what is a depraved mind? READ v 28b-31. A depraved mind does what God does not want us to do. “What ought not be done?” Some listed include envying, deceiving, gossiping, boasting – those are pretty common. In fact, many times in our American culture these actions lead to short term gain. We give deceptive answers to people to avoid a penalty or so they don’t think badly about us. A depraved mind rationalizes those actions God tells us not to do. A depraved mind pushes away God’s word for those areas. A depraved mind makes a habit of those actions. A depraved mind even approves of others doing them.

Now there are twenty-one negative qualities listed in v 29-31 that are representative of a depraved mind (cf. vv. 29–31). I think I can safely say, every one of us in this room who don’t struggle with the first two areas mentioned today, definitely struggle with at least one of these 21 desires. We can’t hide, rationalize, minimize or ignore God’s clear teaching. We do act on some of these desires. That is why humility and regular repentance to God is so important. We don’t want God to free us up to do everything we want to do. We don’t want to learn the hard way. But neither can we straighten out our own life by ourselves or just trying harder. So we confess to God and He forgives us. We challenge our own rationalizations & minimizations. We seek to sacrifice to take one small step in the right direction even though it will often be pathetically insignificant. God’s grace is unleashed in this! Even though we will probably fail again in our most besetting temptations, this keeps our hearts from hardening to the
point where God has to give us over to our wrong desires so we have a chance of finding life, freedom and inner joy by going God’s ways.

B. These common actions are often rewarded short-term
C. Progresses to approve, encourage and advocate the wrong actions & others to join in

Let’s end a different way today to remind us of the simple difference turning to Jesus and having faith His way is the right way makes. I am going to re-read Romans 1:24-32 in the positive of what Jesus is continually seeking to do in each of our lives through faith. (No I am not smart enough to write this; someone else did). When they glorified God as God and regularly thank Him for all He gives them …

Therefore, God gave them over in their hearts to self-control and purity, that their bodies might be honored among them. For they kept and cherished the truth of God and worshiped and served the Creator, who is blessed forever, rather than the creature. Amen.

For this reason God gave them over to pure and wholesome lives, lived with carefree ease even in the most intimate relations so that all received in their own persons the due reward of their fidelity.

And just as they saw fit to acknowledge God in all things, God gave them over to a sound mind, to do those things which are proper, being filled with all righteousness, goodness, generosity, kindness; full of selflessness, life, healing, openness, kindliness; they are gentle in speech, always building others up, lovers of God, respectful, humble, self-effacing, inventors of good, obedient to parents, understanding, trustworthy, loving, merciful; and as they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are possessors of life, they do the same, and give hearty approval to those who do likewise.

God’s grace brings freedom from bondage, light from darkness, life from death. We aren’t going to succeed in living a sinless life on this earth, but we know the direction we want to head. We know whose ways are best no matter how strong our inner desires or human thinking. Trust God’s way in the Bible, not my thoughts or your feelings, because they really are the best for all of us for the long run.

(v 29-31 – There are some natural divisions in the original language as the first 4 are abstract nouns in the dative singular. The next five are in the genitive singular. And the final twelve are in the accusative plural. You don’t have to understand a word of that, I am simply letting you know there are objective linguistic reasons why the three sentences are broken up as they are in the NIV translation.)