

---

## Prayers

### **To God**

*Offer God your time; think about what you are about to do this day, and consider whether your use of time is consistent with what God might advise you*

*Pray to offer yourself to God for this day, especially how you use your time*

### **For Self**

**I praise You, Lord God, for when I am stressed by problems, I can always turn to You for guidance. Lead me through the maze of feelings and emotions that accompany my troubles, for You have always been a help to me through the years. Keep me sure-footed on the pathway of faith and compassionate to all as was Jesus my Lord. May I always keep close to You, Lord God, throughout my life. AMEN**

### **For others**

*Pray for people across the world who seek freedom*

*Pray for political leaders who have the duty to lead with justice*

*Pray for people you know who are involved with politics*

---

## Meditation

*All around us, there are people rushing about,  
Doing the things that people do to keep everything going;  
Working, playing with children, shopping and visiting friends:  
Travelling, texting, phoning, listening to music, eating snacks.*

*All around us, somewhere just beyond our horizons  
Are people rushing about, trying to keep everything going  
Despite the break-up of marriage or the death of a loved one,  
Barely aware of what they are doing; lost, and looking for help.*

*All around us, Jesus is alive and God is with us by His Spirit,  
Just waiting to be found, offering all the strength and help ...  
Now, when trials, troubles, and strife arrive, as they always do,  
Who will point towards this love of God as found in Christ?*

*Who will make it their business to do it?*

---

## Bible Passage

### **Romans 1:26-32**

<sup>26</sup> For this reason God handed them over to shameful passions. Their females exchanged natural sex for what is contrary to the natural order, <sup>27</sup> and in just the same way, males also gave up natural sex with females, and burned with sexual desire for one another, males committing shameless naked acts with males and receiving the due consequences of their perversion amongst themselves.

<sup>28</sup> And in addition, since they did not think it necessary to acknowledge God, God handed them over to a corrupted mind and to doing what should not be done: <sup>29</sup> filled with all manner of evil, wickedness, greed and malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and callous spite; they are rumour-mongers, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, boastful, evil schemers, rebellious to parents, <sup>31</sup> ignorant, disloyal, inhuman and pitiless. <sup>32</sup> Although they know God's natural law, those who practice such things deserve death, for they not only do the same but give approval to those who practice them.

---

## Bible study Review

This is no ordinary passage of Scripture. It follows Paul's analysis of the state of the general Gentile world that has rejected God, and it develops this theme in an astonishing and unrelenting way. He focusses in on homosexuality as a deviant sin, an example of way people set aside God's moral order when they reject Him and become trapped by the consequences of their own sin. But before we run with this theme too rapidly, we should look more carefully at what is said here; there are some aspects of this passage that are too often lost in the race to use it to condemn homosexuality.

To start with, there are only two verses condemning deviant sexuality (1:26,27), and after this (1:28-32), Paul cites a further long list of sins which demonstrate rebellion against God. There are lists like these throughout Paul's letters (e.g. Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 4:31 etc.), but this one is extensive and damning, especially when we include deviant sexuality. Lastly, Paul pronounces God's judgement on all sin, which is separation from God in death (1:32). There is little time for us to draw breath, and there is no escape! As we will soon find out, Paul is setting up an argument about the all-pervasive power of sin, prior to announcing the message of salvation. When we try to work out what this passage says about deviant sexuality then we must keep this perspective in mind.

The message here about sexuality is important. Paul clearly says that sexual practices outside of what is 'natural' are deviant and contrary to God's order, and therefore sin. Paul speaks first of unnatural 'female' sex (1:26), but is not explicit about it. He is then more graphic in describing homosexuality, which he describes as '*males*' who '*give up natural sex with females*', and '*commit shameless naked acts with males ...*' (1:27), and speaks of the '*due consequences of their perversion*', as if we know what he means here. Unfortunately, in our quick assumptions about sex and moral order we can too easily forget to try and work out what this might mean.

Trying to unpick this passage is not easy. Without even entering into the arguments raging within many churches about homosexuality, we should surely notice here that Paul seems to speak most against two things; first the giving up of what is 'natural', and second, the pursuit of sexual deviancy. While the Bible clearly describes male / female sexuality as the God-ordained natural order (see Genesis 1:26,27) and rails against homosexual practice in the Law (Leviticus 18), Paul's words here at least say more. They suggest there is a price to pay for all deviant

sexuality, and it hardly seems necessary to say that we are surrounded by some dreadful examples. Grooming of young people as prostitutes has been in the news, and then there is pornography, pedophilia, and the darker secrets of the Internet which allow these things to thrive. Unfortunately, most of these have been found taking place within the church, so whether we think of homosexuality as 'natural' (and therefore sinful) or not, we should not omit these pernicious evils when considering the human condition.

The second paragraph contains a further list of sins and wrongdoing (1:29-31), and it seems to have little structure. Interestingly, lists were a feature of Greek literature, and Paul used them purposefully. Each sin listed here represents something relating to one of the Ten Commandments, including violence, deviousness, false reporting, rebellion against God or against parents, and attitudes which lie behind these. Also, nearly all are mentioned in Jesus' teaching, especially in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7, e.g. 5:21-42). Each sin is part of a pattern of wrongdoing in the world that is an affront to the purposes and intention of God for those He has made; they will always have consequences.

Paul's conclusion is that all who do these things deserve death. This sounds terrible, for our natural desire is to want to forgive, and we want to hear this Gospel message from Paul, even here. But here, Paul is not talking about how sin is handled, he is reiterating the story of the Fall from Genesis 3. This also tells us that the end result of sin is death. It will only be as we study Romans for much longer that we begin to find the Gospel answers which say that death is not the only possibility. Christ is God's source of reconciliation and life, despite the consequences of our sin.

---

## Going Deeper

### ***Sin and moral responsibility***

Paul is writing here with the broadest of themes in mind. The subjects of human sin and evil, the reasons why there is evil in the world and the consequences of it, have been the stuff of philosophy ever since the Greeks began to explore the subject, hundred years before Christ. Paul was aware of the predominantly Stoic (ex-Greek) philosophy within the Roman Empire of his day, but in his writing he never engages with it, just as he never engages or argues with other religious systems of belief. He makes his appeal to all who will listen to him, and when they do, it proves his theory that the truth of God is inherently present in the world and available to all within a world created 'good'.

It has long been noticed that Paul's argument about the nature of sin in Romans 1 is similar to the story of the Fall in Genesis 3. In that account, Adam falls into sin by accepting temptation out of ignorance, by accepting his wife's invitation to 'eat' (Gen 3:1-7). He then slides further into the mire, choosing to hide from the Lord to avoid his being seen, and then also failing to see God in the world. The first thing he realises after this is that he is embarrassed about being naked. His 'pure' sexuality has been compromised, and this is a clue as to why Paul addresses the issues of sexuality in our passage today. Sex, something created beautiful by God has always been experienced as something far less pure than God intended.

Ultimately, however, Adam's sin is compounded by the awful murder of Abel by Cain (Genesis 4:1-16), and evil then grows even more until the profanity and wickedness of the people of the world becomes so much that God has to destroy the world and start again at the time of the Flood (Gen 6-9). So any Jew who read our passage today would recognise Paul's way of

describing the universal nature of sin in the world. But they would not have known that Paul intended to show that the world needs not a new Noah but a new 'Adam'. The human heart of sin must find its match in the loving heart of God as found in Jesus Christ (5:14).

### ***A list of sins***

In this list of sins Paul begins by pointing out that when the mind rejects the 'logic' of its own creation by the Creator it has itself become corrupted (1:28). It will be one of Paul's very important points within his letter to show that the work of salvation in the believer creates a new '*mind*' which is in tune with the creator; for in the concluding part of his letter he says '*be transformed by the renewing of your minds*' (12:2). He says here that '*all manner of evil*' (1:29) flows from the unregenerate mind; '*wickedness, greed and malice*' (1:29), the first two words of this could be translated '*unrighteousness*' and '*covetousness*', two words with Old Testament history, the first being the opposite of 'right with God' and the second being the subject of the last of the ten commandments! Amongst the rest of the list there are evils of strife and conflict (1:29), evils of the tongue (1:30) and evils which dishonour relationship (1:30,31) such as rebellion against parents and disloyalty.

The final insult of evil identified by Paul is that those who encourage and teach others to do evil (1:32). It is the ultimate consequence of sin that God, in His just 'wrath', respects the choices of those who choose evil.(1:20,24,26,28).

### ***Homosexuality in the Roman world***

We should be careful to note that the picture Paul paints of homosexuality is true to what we know of the first century. Homosexuality was regarded as a virtue in some parts of the Roman Empire, notably those that were the remnants of the Greek Empire which preceded it, and whose rampant armies were, in parts, notoriously held together by homosexual relationships. It is also clear from documents of the time that the wealthy and cultured indulged in sex with young children, and with boys in particular; the Emperor Nero was infamous in this respect. Lastly, the town of Lesbos is where female sexual extravagance developed giving its name to 'lesbianism', the female for of what is properly called homosexuality.

Whilst these things were known and accepted as part of the world in which people lived, it does not mean to say that everyone in the Roman Empire accepted homosexuality as 'right' or 'acceptable'. Certainly, the Israelite nation and the Jews who lived in cities across the known world were known to regard homosexuality as morally wrong. This undoubtedly stems from the the Old Testament Law and Jewish belief about the nature of God being reflected in humanity, male and female.

In this letter, Paul assumes anything other than heterosexual intimacy as contrary to 'nature', and he had good reason to say that the differing forms of homosexuality practiced in his day were not examples of good social interaction. Certainly, he uses here a word which means 'sex with boys' in some Greek literature (translated here '*shameless naked acts*' – 1:27). It is also possible that in this passage, Paul is saying that homosexuality breeds more homosexuality, and because this does not represent the 'natural' use of sexual organs (for procreation), then logically, it is ultimately counter-productive to humanity.

---

## **Application**

# **Discipleship issues**

## **Sexuality?**

One of the problems of the debate about homosexuality today is that people popularly say that what is 'natural' is 'whatever you want to do', and this is not how Paul defines what is natural here in Romans. Much of the distress about this issue today is created because people want to say that homosexuality is 'natural' for people who are 'born that way', but this is a huge presumption, which cannot be proved. Strangely, for a world in which we know so much about humanity through our understanding of genes, no-one has ever been able to identify what it means to be 'born that way', and there is no consensus about how much homosexuality is generated by social phenomena, however deep seated and unconscious.

It is undoubtedly true that some people genuinely struggle with their sexual identity, but it is extremely unhelpful for society to label people on the basis of such personal agonies. I believe that to promote sexual practice devious of what sex is designed for is ultimately destructive of society, because sex becomes a matter of personal property and performance rather than part of the essential procreation activity of our species under God (though I know that many would disagree with me in saying this). Nevertheless, the Christian position must not be to condemn people because of such struggles, but to seek to engage with the issues and find God's answers. The Gospel still calls us to reflect on what it means for men and women to reflect God's image in this world, principally through marriage. It also warns that where society rejects God's natural order of love and procreation, and where people chose sexual deviancy for themselves instead of family security, then society becomes unstable and people suffer.

## **Salvation for all, of whatever sexuality**

Paul's analysis here in Romans can help us as we explore these issues, but it should not be seen as blanket permission to dismiss the personal experiences of those who genuinely feel they have sexual feelings and a self understanding that is not the same as most men and women, and would call themselves homosexuals. The Gospel that Paul explains here in Romans says that Jesus Christ is the source of liberation and salvation for all those under God's judgement, and as we shall find out, this means all of us, whatever we think about 'sexual orientation'.

For Christians who believe they are homosexuals, I suggest that if this aspect of life is offered to God for His judgement along with all other aspects of life, then He will reveal how best to handle their feelings and sense of identity. They are not alone. Heterosexual people have a multitude of sexual struggles to deal with which are largely hidden, and God will do the same for them. He will guide through the complex issues presented by attitudes in today's society, and explain how to manage life in society and the kingdom of God. Whatever else has happened to each of us along life's journey, and whatever we feel about ourselves, God has made all people equal in His sight, and He offers the same route to heaven through Christ, whatever people say about 'sexuality'..

## **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Have a close look at the list of sins in this passage, and see whether any of them describe you in any way. Do you best to pray about this and ask the Lord to show you how to deal with it. Speak to a friend or loved one if necessary.*
- *You may know someone in your church who takes a different view on the issue of homosexuality than you do. Have a discussion with them about what Paul says here,*

*and see if you can agree with what Paul says, why he says it, and why this is part of scripture.*

## **Questions for groups**

- 1. Discuss in your group what you think about Paul's comments on homosexuality.*
- 2. In your observation, does evil always produce evil, and compound itself in the way Paul describes?*
- 3. Which part of the long list of evils and wickedness are important for us to pay attention to, because they are prevalent in our society?*

---

## **Final Prayer**

**If we give Your Spirit free reign in our lives, then Your Love, O Lord Jesus, saves us from more than we can imagine. Your Love will save us from bitterness, from fear, from hopelessness, from aggression, and from all the works of the enemy to draw us back into sin. Praise You Lord Jesus for Your love, shown in death, which conquers all.**

**AMEN**