

# “How the Fall Affects Us All”

// Romans 1:24–32 //

## Romans #4

**Alright... Romans 1/p22.** This might be the toughest week we'll have in Romans—tied only with Romans 5, Romans 9, and Romans 11.

So, **everybody turn to your neighbor right now and say**, *“These are going to be some hard truths; I am praying that you have enough humility and faith to receive them. But from the looks of you, I'm not optimistic.”*

But we believe God's word is good, Amen?

**I've been pretty nervous all week: My wife was trying to give me some encouragement.** She said, 'Look... this not about you. Just teach what the Bible says. Don't try to be too witty or intellectual. Just be yourself.' So, I'm not sure what that means.

But **let's pray...**

- And let me say to you **parents**, the text this week definitely has some more mature content, as Paul gets into some pretty raw stuff.
- So, this may be an **ideal week to have your kids try out our** excellent kids' ministry options. If you go back to the lobby at your campus, someone can guide you there.

**So, as I pray**, you can duck out and be back before we really get going...

PRAYER

**P. 20 in your Journal. Here's where we left off last week:**

**In Romans 1** Paul is showing us that **every person** (Jew, Gentile, religious, irreligious) has the **same problem**: we have all **turned away from the knowledge of God** that was made known to us in creation and in our consciences.

**God has sufficiently revealed himself, Paul says**, both **TO US** (from the Creation) and **IN US (through our consciences)** for us to respond with humility and awe--but **we didn't want to know the truth about a glorious, ruling, holy God (and that's because we wanted to be the glorious, all-wise, all-ruling ones)**. So, we **suppressed** the truth.

**When it comes to the knowledge of God, we all know, I told you**, but sometimes we don't know because we don't want to know.

**That suppression takes 1 of 2 forms, I explained:**

- There is an **irreligious expression**--think atheism/agnosticism, where you deny God exists. Paul says that the only way you can arrive at that conclusion if you have a heart biased against the obvious evidence for an **all-powerful, ruling God**.
  - And I'll say, in my experience: **Listen closely to an atheist** and you'll **almost always hear that their disbelief is driven by some implication** that comes from there being an all-glorious, all-wise God that **drives how** they interpret the evidence:
    - **If there is a God**, why would he allow suffering?
    - Or, why would he let there be so many religions?
    - Or **something like that**.
- That's the **irreligious expression** of suppression.
- The **religious version** of suppression: we substitute out the true God with a version of him we can control.
  - I pointed out that throughout history **mankind has worshipped all kinds of different gods**, but they've all had one thing in common: they exist to serve us!

This is what Paul meant when he said (We) <sup>25</sup> **They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen.**

And I explained that **this worship occurs whether you are formally religious or not.**

- **Anthropologists say we are telic creatures**--purposed people--who always find some greater cause to live for. We find something to attach ultimate value to; something we determine that without that thing life would not be worth living.
  - It's like Jordan Peterson, the Canadian psychologist, **who is not a Christian**, says it: *"There are no true atheists, practically speaking. There are those who acknowledge the gods they are worshipping and those who don't."*
- **Even if you grew up as a Christian, chances are something besides God** took ultimate place in your heart: getting the approval of your friends; accomplishing your dreams; getting married. Something mattered more to you--you gave more glory to it, than God. (KABOD?)
- **This is the natural shape now of every human heart, even if you grew up in church.** In some of my travels overseas I'll go into these temples built to a god. I remember in one Hindu country, there was this gigantic statue of a woman with multiple breasts. You'd watch people come in, **prostrate themselves** before it... many were really emotional, offering the only money they had to it.
  - I remember **once getting so overwhelmed** at what felt like spiritual darkness I had to leave. Later I found myself thinking about it, feeling sorry for the people later, thanking God I'm not like them.
- **And then it occurred to me:** I have a **whole list of things that have taken God's place in my heart, too**, and they are just as nauseating and oppressive to God as that statue is. I've lived for the admiration of others. For reputation. For material success.
- Bottom line: **All of us, alike, have rejected the truth evident in creation and our consciences about an all-glorious, all-ruling God** and replaced him with created things, giving those things the place and priority in our hearts that **only God deserves**.
- **All of us.**

<sup>26</sup>For this reason God delivered them over to disgraceful passions.

- **This was the first wave of God's judgment, I explained.** God just gave us what we asked for.
  - **It's as if the earth said to the sun**, I told you, *"I want to be at the center of the solar system"*--and the sun granted that request. The solar system **would come unraveled** just because the sun gave the earth what it asked for.
  - So, when God granted our wish to be at the center our lives began to unravel.
- And, I explained to you that throughout the **rest of the passage (if you read it in Greek)**, there's a lot of **tit for tat**:
  - For example, vs. 23 **they exchanged** the glory of God for images (vs. 23) ... so God **exchanged** them over to disgraceful passions and unnatural sexual desires (vs. 26)\*
  - They **dishonored** God (vs. 21) ... so God let them **dishonor** themselves (vs. 24)
  - "they did not **see fit** to acknowledge God" (vs. 28) ... so God gave them up to an **unfit mind**" (vs. 28)\*

**Paul now begins to explain how this has played out in our lives and in human history:**

<sup>26</sup>Their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. <sup>27</sup>The men in the same way also left natural relations with women and were inflamed in their lust for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their error.

This is the longest and clearest **passage in the Bible** on homosexuality.

- (And let me just say, I know that historically we in the church haven't done a great job talking about this, and an ever worse job caring for those going through this--but let's just look humbly and open-mindedly at what Paul says here first and then we'll talk about what it means for people following Jesus)
- Paul says that **one of the results of displacing God** in the center of our hearts was that **we developed unnatural** sexual patterns.

- **We exchanged the truth about God for a lie (vs. 25), so God exchanged our natural, healthy passions** for unnatural ones (vs. 26).
- In one sense, we shouldn't be surprised this is where Paul turns first. **He's not picking on homosexuality.** *If God made us in his image, male and female... then it shouldn't surprise us that the effects of our rejection of us show up in those primary relationships.*
- Paul cites homosexuality, one scholar says, "not because it is a greater sin than any other, but because it is the clearest evidence of a rejection of God's order in creation."<sup>1</sup>

Now, in recent years, some have tried to say this passage refers only to **certain kinds of promiscuous homosexual acts—prostitution, or one-night stands, or masters forcing slaves** to have sex with them, and that kind of stuff, and that **Paul was simply unfamiliar** with the committed, loving **homosexual unions** we see today and **if he had** he would have made the distinction.

- **But that's not true: Enduring, committed, same-sex relationships** were most certainly a "thing" in the Roman world and Paul most definitely knew about them.
  - **Plutarch—who wrote in the 1<sup>st</sup> century**--makes a distinction between homosexual sex for mere pleasure (which he considered unworthy) and homosexual practice rooted in a committed relationship which he considered beautiful.<sup>2</sup>
  - In one of **Plato's works** he mentions 2 adult men who were lovers for more than 10 yrs.<sup>3</sup>
  - **As a well-read, well-traveled Roman citizen, Paul would certainly have known about these things.**<sup>4</sup>
  - Yet, Paul doesn't distinguish between kinds of homosexual acts, and **identifies all sexual relations of men between men and women between women** as a departure from the

<sup>1</sup> Read / Mark / Learn: Romans: A Small Group Bible Study by St. Helens Bishopsgate

<sup>2</sup> Plutarch, *Dialogue on Love*. See also Thomas Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*

<sup>3</sup> *Symposium, Pausanias, and Agathon*

<sup>4</sup> Craig Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, and K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*.

Creator's design for human flourishing. They are unnatural, he says. Literally in Greek, "against nature."<sup>5</sup>

**Again, it's important to realize that Paul is not just randomly** picking on homosexuality here, he is **citing it as one of the clearest examples of elevating our desires over the Creator's design,**<sup>6</sup> in which we say, "It's not about what the Creator wants; it's about what I want."

**Homosexuality is not the only example, though,** so Paul goes on to mention other ways that our idolatry--our prioritizing of our desires over the Creator's design--causes creation to unravel.<sup>7</sup>

(We'll come **back to this discussion on homosexuality**, but first let's get through the rest of what Paul says here.)

<sup>28</sup> **And because they** (btw: in chapter 2 **Paul is going to show us that "they" are "we."** There's no "us" and "them" but "we." Paul explains that he is a chief member of this group) **did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God, God delivered them over to a corrupt mind so that they do what is not right.**

We've already talked about sexual disorder...

<sup>29</sup> **They are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness.** That's **economic disorder**

**They are full of envy, murder, quarrels, deceit, and malice. They are gossips,**<sup>30</sup> **slanderers,** That's **social disorder (IOW, Facebook)**

<sup>5</sup> Tim Keller, *Romans for You*, 32–33.

<sup>6</sup> Tom Schreiner: "Why does Paul focus on same-sex relations, especially since it receives little attention elsewhere in his writings (1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10)? Probably because it functions as a fitting illustration of that which is unnatural in the sexual sphere. Idolatry is unnatural in the sense that it is contrary to God's intention for human beings ... Just as idolatry is a violation and perversion of what God intended, so too same-sex relations are contrary to what God planned when he created man and woman."

<sup>7</sup> Schreiner: "The fundamental sin isn't sexual but the failure to worship God. All other sin is a consequence of this one."

God-haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, inventors of evil, **That's spiritual disorder\***

disobedient to parents,<sup>31</sup> senseless, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful. That's **family disorder**

(And this is **not intended to be an exhaustive list**--just a sample: he's trying to say **our idolatry**--the elevation of our desires over God's will--has affected every part of our lives.

- Sexual disorder
- Economic disorder
- Social disorder
- Spiritual disorder
- Family disorder

**It's what theologians call "the doctrine of total depravity."** It doesn't mean we are all as bad as we could be, but rejection of God at the center corrupted every part of our lives.<sup>8</sup>

**He starts with homosexuality but goes on to show** how every part of our life is affected by the disorder that comes from sin.

- **Me at NCSL:**
  - In college, I was part of this thing called the NCSL where once a year each college would send a team to Raleigh and you would present and debate bills. They would put us all up in this one hotel... one hotel filled with hundreds of college students...
  - "They had questions about homosexuality and I told them you could answer them."
  - "Worst sermon intro ever."
  - At this point, I'm not sure I'm awake. This feels like every speaker's worst nightmare: I'm standing in a room full of strangers, half-naked, asked to answer the most controversial

question possible on the spot. This is where I **pinch myself** to see if I'm awake.

- Sure enough, I was... so I was like, "Uhh... Romans 1."
- "You're saying homosexuality is the worst sin?" No, he's saying that homosexuality is one of the many corruptions that come from our sin--"How many of you are guilty of 95% of that list?"
- Let's go through it again: <sup>29</sup>They are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness. They are full of envy, murder, quarrels, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, <sup>30</sup>slanderers, God-haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup>senseless, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful.

The corruption manifests itself differently in different people.

- I might struggle less with certain things on that list--but my heart is corrupt and full of disorder.

**In fact, here's an important question: Are these things the cause of God's judgment, or the result?** Both.

The **chief sin--the really wicked one**--is rejecting God as the center and ruler of our life. That's the **sin that brought on all the corruption**, and it's one we've all participated in alike equally.

**And here's the thing:** We **don't always get to choose which way** it affects us.

**In some people,** corruption manifests itself in envy, pride, unbridled personal ambitions, an out-of-control temper; maybe an inability to control your impulses for food; a propensity toward doubt, worry or depression.

- **In others, it manifests itself in some form of corrupted sexual desire.**
  - (And BTW, Al Mohler points out that **all of us have** corrupted sexual desires in some form.)

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<sup>8</sup> Tim Keller, *Romans for You*, 35

- **The central sin is the same:** we rejected God’s rule and substituted our own. That **manifests in different people differently** and we don’t always get to choose our corruption.
- **Let me say something that I fear might get misunderstood:** In that sense, you can think of **homosexuality as an affliction** and not just a sinful choice. For **most gay people**, they feel they **didn’t choose those desires**.
  - Here’s what I’ve learned: almost **every person I’ve encountered (in the church, at least)** who struggles with a same-sex attraction is almost always dealing first and foremost with an unanswered prayer: “God, why won’t you take away these desires?”
  - Let me say that again: **Every Christian I know struggling with SSA is first dealing with an unanswered prayer.**
- Which means people with SSA **really ought to be first and foremost recipients** of our compassion.
- **This doesn’t make same-sex behavior any less sinful**, any more than it makes outbursts of temper or envy or materialism less sinful. Just that **we don’t always get to choose our weakness** or our corruption.
- And that means **gay and lesbian people are not worse sinners** than other people or a different kind of sinner. They just got affected with a different dimension of the curse.
- And that **changes how we think and talk about it**.

Three ways we really go wrong with this in the church:

### 1. Believing God doesn’t care about this

- **He does.** He’s crystal clear in this passage, as well as **5 other ones** in the Old and New Testament.<sup>9</sup> Passages like this one:
  - **“Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men, nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers**

<sup>9</sup> The biblical depiction of sexuality hangs on much more than these passages, but the relevant passages *directly* addressing homosexuality are: Genesis 19:1–11, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:26–27, 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, and 1 Timothy 1:10.

**nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Cor 6:9–10)**

- Someone says, **“But I was born this way.”** I don’t dispute that.
- And **some of us were born with a propensity toward selfish ambition** or a raging temper. The Bible’s message is **we all need to be born again**.
  - You get that **possessing a desire innately** doesn’t make it right, right?
  - **Anger** or **ambition** or **certain sexual desires** are not right simply because they come from deep within me.
  - If I were to **come to my wife and say**, “You are beautiful: 10 vs. 4.5... Well, I must have been born polygamous... so I have to be true to myself, so Veronica, you are going to have to be ok with that.” Veronica would say, “I’m going to have to be true to myself and smack you **upside the head with a 2x4.**”
- **Possessing a desire innately** just shows us that we have corrupt hearts and we need to be born again.
- **You can’t reform your way into heaven; you have to be born from above.**
- The gospel message is not “let the gay become straight” but “let the dead become alive.”

*Which leads me to the 2nd way we go wrong here...*

### 2. Thinking it’s the worst sin

- Paul lists **homosexuality as simply one corruption** among many.
- **Look at the rest of that list:** Question:
  - **Do you think of deceit and boasting as equally ‘depraved’?**
  - Greed?
  - How about a **rebellious attitude** toward your parents? They are.
- **In another one of his letters**, Paul even talks about the pride that comes from religion and an **obsession to be better** than

others as an example of this idolatry (Gal 4:8–9). Is that equally depraved in your book? It should be.

- **I mean, in terms of frequency of mention and the passion with which he mentions it**, it would appear that quite a few other sins are more egregious in God’s eyes than homosexuality.
  - **Jen Wilkin** says we should **whisper about what the Bible whispers about and shout about what it shouts about**. The Bible **appears more to whisper on sexual sin** compared to its shouts about materialism and religious pride.
  - **And we see Jesus demonstrating great sympathy for those in sexual sin** and great animosity toward the religiously proud.
  - Jesus never said it was **hard for the same-sex attracted to go to heaven**; he did say it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a religiously proud or materially wealthy person to get there.
- This is not to say it’s not sinful--just to say we often present it differently than the Bible does.
- **The worst sin, the core sin, the sin behind all the other sins--is something we are all alike guilty of.**
- **Listen: We only grasp the gospel when we understand**, as Paul did, that **we are the worst sinner we know** (1 Tim 1:15)—and **that if Jesus came to die for us**, there is no one that he would not die for.
- When you realize that, **you’ll cease being a Pharisaic teacher of the law and you’ll become a gospel witness. You’ll start loving your neighbor** as someone made in the **image of God** and feeling compassion for them in their weakness.
  - And you’ll **treat them first and foremost like people who deserve compassion, not scorn or judgment or a political voting bloc** to be marginalized.
  - One of the **reasons that we stand against** any discrimination or bullying and will count ourselves among the **fiercest advocates for the preservation of their dignity and rights**--because we recognize gay and lesbian

people are just like us--made in the image of God like us and deserving of all the dignity and respect we desire.

- They are not “them,” they are “**we.**” *You should see in the face of every sinner a reflection of the corruption that afflicts your own heart; the fruit of the rebellion you have participated in.*
  - **Is that how you read Romans 1?**

*3rd way we go wrong...*

### **3. Assuming it’s hard for LGBT people to get to heaven**

- **Let me say something very clearly:** Homosexuality does not send you to hell.
  - And **here’s how I know that:** Being heterosexual doesn’t send you to heaven.
- **What sends you to hell is refusing to allow** Jesus to be the Lord and center of your life, **regardless of how that manifests**--it might manifest itself in your refusal to let Jesus be Lord over your sexual life; or in your refusal to obey him with your money; or your right to control your career.
- It’s **not where you express** your rebellion that matters but **that it exists.**
- **Rosaria Butterfield**, whose story I have told you before (*practicing lesbian, Prof of Literature and Women’s Studies at Syracuse*), said that **Romans 1 brought her to Christ.**
  - The **pastor who led her to Christ refused** (at first) to argue about her lesbianism. He told her that according to Romans 1, the real issue was who got to call the shots in her life. How she defined herself. How she sought fulfillment.
  - **Romans 1, Rosaria explains, revealed my heart** to me. In Romans 1, she says, Paul shows us that we all go through what Eve went through in the Garden of Eden. We have to ask:
    - *Who gets to declare what is good?*
    - *What is Lord in my life--my desires or God’s word?*
  - She says, **“Homosexuality is not the core of our rebellion against God; a desire to be God is. A desire to be the one**

*who gets to declare good and evil, 'play judge rather than be judged.' A desire to use God's creation for our own gratification rather than with pleasure, for his glory."*<sup>10</sup>

- And **that means that repentance for the gay or lesbian person** looks fundamentally the same as it does for the straight or religious person.
  - "God, I'm sorry for elevating my desires over your will.
  - I'm sorry for attempting to define my identity apart from your design for me.
  - I'm sorry for taking on myself the authority to declare what's good.
  - I'm sorry for seeking satisfaction in self-fulfillment rather than from giving glory to you.
  - I recognize Jesus is Lord and turn over control to him."
- That's what repentance looks like for **a gay, straight, rich, poor, young, old, Jew, Gentile, black or white**.
- We all **come to Jesus in the same way**.
- The core sin for all of us is a desire to play God. Repentance looks fundamentally the same for us, as does salvation.
- The good news is that **Jesus came to save sinners**. ALL KINDS. It **matters not WHAT kind of sinner** you are, but what kind of Savior he is.

**Bottom line here:** *Paul's approach to homosexuality is neither what we'd call liberal nor classically conservative in our culture. He doesn't deny its sinfulness like a liberal nor does he elevate it as the chief of all sins like a conservative. He lists it as one of many examples of the corruptions that came from a society that has rejected God and replaced ourselves and our desires in the center where he belongs, a rebellion in which we have all alike participated equally.*

If you are SSA:

- God loves you
- We love you--want to walk with you
- We don't believe your sexual identity defines
- We'd love to talk

- Parents?

**One more verse:** *32 Although they know God's just sentence—that those who practice such things deserve to die (IOW, we know in our hearts that God disapproves)—they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them.*

**Idolatry has produced the most horrendous sins** throughout history--sins that we look back on and clearly see how corrupt they were, but at the time were applauded.

- **It was idolatry, for example, that drove some of the brutal conquests in history.** But at the time, the conquering warriors were lauded as heroes.
  - We look back and say "That's so wrong. For you just to go in and take somebody's land."
  - **But it seemed right to them** because they were blinded by idolatry.
- **It was idolatry in our own country** that led to the unfair treatment of indigenous peoples or that fueled our nation's **horrendous history on slavery and oppression**.
  - **Read our founding documents: Jefferson and many of our Founding Fathers** knew it was wrong but they rationalized it because it good for the economy and they didn't want to upset the status quo.
  - **This is why many of the Christians who should have known better didn't speak up**, or even rationalized it.
    - **Some of the first slaves on American shores** came via a Dutch trader who arrived at Jamestown with 20 enslaved Africans taken from a Spanish slaver. The English would not enslave them (particularly because they had been baptized and the English considered them brethren), and had them join the other 1000 indentured servants who would in time earn their freedom. But over the next **50 years (one generation) the same English would change their mind** about the image of God in the African, and determine that they were suitable for chattel slavery.

<sup>10</sup> Rosaria Butterfield, *Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*

- Scholars say **this was driven by the recognition** of how slavery could lead to great economic gain.
- We knew, but we didn't know, because we didn't want to know.
- **MLK was clear** that he **wasn't introducing some new truth** into our culture, but calling us to reckon with what we knew instinctively already to be true--what was in our very creed as Americans: that all men are created equal and endowed by their **Creator with certain inalienable rights** including life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness... (words written by a man who owned slaves!)
- **So we knew, but we didn't know**, because we didn't want to know--and thus we practiced it, and approved it, and institutionalized it.
- Even now, **where racism and bigotry** exist: **we know**, but we don't want to know...

**We look back on these things now, and can see the corruption**, and we say, "How can they have been so blind?"

But **we continue to practice the same idolatry**, and are equally blind to the corruption our idolatry fills our society with.

Lots of things I could talk about here, but **last week was National Right to Life Sunday**.

**In many ways, at the bedrock of the the pro-choice agenda is a commitment to protect idolatry:** *I want to be the one, instead of God, who determines the life or death of the baby based on how it affects me.*

**I pulled this off the PP site explaining their commitment to abortion:** *"Everyone has their own unique and valid reasons for having an abortion. Some of the many different reasons people decide to end a pregnancy include:*

- *They're not in a relationship with someone they want to have a baby with.*

- *It's not a good time in their life to have a baby.*
- *They want to finish school, focus on work, or achieve other goals before having a baby.*
- *They just don't want to be a parent.*"<sup>11</sup>

BTW, I realize that many of you **struggle with this... I know we have women** who have had abortions or who are currently experiencing an unplanned pregnancy, and I know that you are **hurting**. I don't want to make this any harder than it is... we are here for you.

We have **some even work in these places**, and you entered that profession to serve, and I understand why you are conflicted...

But I want you to think of this: **The most important question we have to consider in abortion is this:** Is the baby inside the womb a **human life**, made in the image of God? And, **if so, is it ever right to willfully take innocent human life?**

- **Someone says: "My rights, my body."**
  - I agree. But the **unborn child is not part of your body**. The baby has her own DNA, her own brain waves, and her own blood type. It's **not part** of your body.
  - I've **always believed that women and men should have control over their bodies**. Which is **why I have to be against elective** abortion, because it destroys an innocent female or male body without their consent.
- People say, "Well, **what about rape and incest?**" Tragic and painful situation.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/abortion/considering-abortion>. Or this from John Piper: "I took an abortionist out to lunch once, prepared to give him ten reasons why the unborn are human beings. He stopped me, and said, 'I know that. We are killing children.' I was stunned. He said, 'It's simply a matter of justice for women. It would be a greater evil to deny women the equal right of reproductive freedom.'" Which means women should be no more encumbered by the consequences of an unplanned pregnancy than men. ... We know what that means. We are killing children."



- But... **is the child at fault** for how they got there? Are they not still made in the image of God... innocent human beings?
- **What people mean by this question** is usually, *“This baby came to me through one of the most painful and tragic events of my life. Why should I be **forced to bear the burden of something that only reminds me that pain?”**”*
- And that **certainly is a heart-rending situation.**
- But here’s **the most important question:** *How does a civil and just society treat innocent human beings that remind us of painful events? By killing them? Could we do that with a two year old that reminds us of a painful event?*
  - Again, **the question is whether this is a human being** made in the image of God.
- And **what about cases of babies** we know will be mentally disabled or have some kind of significant deformity?
  - **Are they not still made in the image of God?** If so, then they deserve our protection.
- **At the end of the day, the question is,**
  - Who should get to determine whether a baby lives or dies?
  - Do we **follow the Creator’s design**--that innocent people made in the image of God deserve our protection--or do we get to deny that when it is inconvenient for us?
  - And **even if you are unsure:** “Maybe it’s *not fully human* in the womb.” Think of it like this. If you are out hunting and you see something rustle in the bushes, but you are not sure what it is: it might be a deer, or it might be your friend... **what do you do?** Do you take the shot? No. *Until you are 100% sure that it’s not your friend, don’t take the shot.* If there’s any question about whether the baby is a human, preserve life.

And, again, **I know that some of you got in a bad situation** and you were feeling all kinds of pressure and maybe you felt like you had no other option.

- I want you to know there is forgiveness and healing for that--we don’t consider you a worse sinner than any of us and you can experience forgiveness like any of us...

I’m **just trying to show that the whole discussion** is undergirded by an unwillingness to trust God and do things his way--

**Rejecting God’s way leads** to more regret and corruption; trusting God leads to life... **I got to see this play out here at our church last year...**

- Last year when we talked about it / backlash
- The other reason: **Pic\***
- “That’s God’s design”

**<sup>32</sup> Although they know God’s just sentence—that those who practice such things deserve to die—they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them.\***

- We saw a really graphic illustration of this this week. The **NY State legislature** passed a bill approving abortion up to the very moment of birth. Can you tell me what the difference is between a baby 2 minutes before it is born and 2 minutes after? And **when they did the legislature applauded.**<sup>12</sup>

But if anything, friends, based on Romans 1, we don’t look at any of these things and say, “What’s wrong with them?” We say, “What’s wrong with us?” **I’ve voluntarily participated** in the same idolatry that led to *that*, and I am **experiencing the same kinds of corruption** in my heart.

The chief wickedness is not abortion or slavery or homosexuality, it is replacing God...

- You can’t **fathom how evil** that is...
- To say, “I will determine what is good, not you; I will be in charge, not you; I will get the glory, not you.”

<sup>12</sup>

<https://www.faithwire.com/2019/01/23/new-york-senate-erupts-in-applause-after-passing-horrific-late-term-abortion-bill/>

- and **we're all guilty**

Paul is **heading toward this conclusion** in chapter 3, I'll go ahead and give it to you: **Romans 3:10**, "...There is no one righteous, not even one. 11 There is no one who understands; there is no one who (instinctively) seeks God. 12 All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one. 13 (Our) Their throat is an open grave; they deceive with their tongues. Vipers' venom is under their lips. 14 Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. 15 Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 ruin and wretchedness are in their paths... 23 For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God."

We **all stand** under judgment. Not just certain *kinds* of sinners--all kinds.

And the only hope for any of us is the blood of Jesus.

The **greatest truth of Romans**: The **righteousness of God revealed in the gospel** is not a standard by which he judges sinners, but a gift of righteousness by which justifies them.

He is **not just a righteous God angered** by our sin, but a **merciful Father** who wants to save us from it, who was **willing even to interject himself** into our place and suffer his wrath for us so that we could be spared.

Makes us sing

**There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins**

(If you grew up in church, you think, "Oh, great song." People who didn't are like, "What???? Fountain of blood? What kind of freak show is this?")

But yes, **And sinners plunged beneath that blood, lose all their guilty stains**

- All: We serve a **Savior whose blood can cleanse the deepest sin** (though your sin be as scarlet...)
- **In the gospel we see that**
- And whose resurrection has the power to restore beauty from ashes.
- He can do that with you. Trust him.

The **dying thief** (worst kind of sinner--murderer, thief, rapist) **rejoiced to see that fountain in his day**

And there may I, though vile as he (Maybe not guilty of murder or rape, but I'm guilty of the same core sin), **wash all my sins away**  
It matters not what kind of sinner you are, but what kind of Savior he is.