

Fullness of Time: Sinful Culture

06.13.2021

We're in the second part of our series – “The Fullness of Time

Where we're teaching through the front half of the book of Romans

And today is a big topic

So if you want to grab a Bible

And turn to Romans 1

Page 768 in these Bibles

We'll be there in just a second

This is really like part 2 from last week

So if you didn't get a chance to listen to that

You should

But let me bring you up to speed quickly:

Romans 1:1-17 – warm welcome to the Roman church

Romans 1:18-32 – speaking *to* the Roman church *about* the broken Roman culture

Romans 2 – speaking *to* the Roman church *about* the Roman church

Telling them to quit being judgmental and prideful

Romans 3 – declaring that

There is no one righteous, not even one... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:10b, 23-24)

I'd like to read this entire passage

Romans 1, verses 18-32

And then we'll go back and break them down verse by verse.

Read Romans 1:18-32

Happy Father's Day!

By the way

I just want to be clear on something

When I laid this series out

Several months ago

I wasn't really thinking about Father's Day

In regards to this message

And it didn't really dawn on me

That I'd be teaching this passage during Pride Month

That wasn't intentional

So I need you to know that:

I'm not teaching this because it's political

I'm not teaching this because it's controversial

I'm not teaching this because I want to put 'those people' in their place

I'm teaching this because it's in the text that we're covering

The book of Romans

I'm teaching this because I have a love of the Scriptures

They are the pathway to life & peace

I'm teaching this because I have a love of people

And a love of students

And this discussion is real

And relevant

And deeply consequential

For people that I love

So I was willing to put in extra work

Honestly, this would have been an easier message to deliver if I had 2-3 hours instead of 30 minutes

And I'm willing to answer the emails and criticisms that *will* come

And I'll put up with people judging my motives and my heart

Because I have a deep trust in the Scriptures
And a deep love for people in this broken world

I was reading this week about Jesus
As He was preparing to enter the city of Jerusalem
I thought it might be helpful to show you what that looks like today

This would have been the location where Jesus spoke in Luke 19

So Jesus – as He was preparing to enter the city of Jerusalem
Knowing what He was coming to do
Knowing the lengths He was willing to go to bring people life & peace
And with God's eyes to see

As He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it – Luke 19:41

The root of the word translated “city”
Makes it clear He's talking about people
Not the streets and buildings
He sees the people
And it moved Jesus to tears

**and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace —
but now it is hidden from your eyes. – Luke 19:42**

They couldn't see it
They couldn't see Him
They heard His words
But they didn't believe Him
They listened to His teachings
But they dismissed them
They explained them away
And in response
Jesus didn't call down fire from Heaven
Although He had the power to do so
He didn't judge them and point His finger at them

Although He had the right to do so
He wept
Because He had the heart to do so

He had not come to condemn the people {For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. – John 3:17}

But to save them

And they dismissed Him for it
We dismissed Him
Because we knew better
And it broke His heart

Jesus was passionate about people

And He was passionate about the Word of God
And you will likely hear me get passionate today as well
If that happens, let me be clear beforehand

My passion does not come from judgment or condescension towards people with same-sex attraction

But because I'm broken by the number of people who are dismissing the Word of God
Which is designed to give them life & peace

And I'm angry

Not at people who are caught in sexual sin
Heterosexual or homosexual

Not at people who have same-sex attraction

Or who disagree with my interpretation of this passage

I'm angry

Because there are so many people

You have no idea how many hours of reading I've done this week

There are so many people

Who are pulling out some Greek word

Or turn a clever phrase

To convince people think that the Bible doesn't mean what it seems to mean

And they are either... wrong

Or they know

But they hope you don't know

And they convince you

Because they sounded smart and compassionate

But honestly, they went to the Bible

With their answers already in hand

Wanting it to say something specific

And so they twist and pull the Scriptures

To make them say something they don't say

And because they're clever and articulate

They are misleading a lot of people

And that makes me angry

Because of the Word of God is powerful

And it's designed to give us life & peace

And James tells us

Those of us who teach it will be judged more strictly

But today – all you need is a website or blog

And you're a theologian

And it makes me mad

Not in the "easily offended", "how dare you" sort of way

But in the "momma bear", "you're coming after the wrong cubs" sort of way

So I'm gonna try to keep that in check

Let's go back and work through this passage:

Read Romans 1:18

Let's stop a second

The word “all” there

The Greek word “passan”

It literally means... “All”

That’s why they translated it that way

The wrath of God is being revealed from Heaven against “all” the godlessnessness and wickedness of people

Paul, out the outset, describes the wrath of God

The swelling anger of God

Coming from Heaven

To earth

Against a lot of shenanigans

Not just one sin

Not just one group

Read Romans 1:18-19

Now starting here in verse 20

I want you to notice all of the references to Creation

“Why is that important?”, you ask

Sometimes in Scripture

The writer speaks to a specific issue

Or gives advice to a specific person

And it wasn’t meant to apply to everyone

Greet this person or that person

Other times

Paul & Jesus both do this

Other times, they will refer back to creation as the rationale

It's the Biblical way to say

This is for all times

For all generations

For all cultures

Because everybody points back in their lineage to Adam & Eve

Everything points back to the garden as the original intent

Read Romans 1:20

So there's 2 references

Did you catch those?

“Creation of the world”

“What has been made”

That pattern continues – watch for it

Read Romans 1:21

“Their thinking became futile”

The word “futile” means there was an increase in vanity

And a lack of direction

Aim-less-ness

Their thinking became (literally) vain and directionless

And their foolish hearts

Our foolish hearts

Were darkened

Now catch verse 22

Read Romans 1:22-23

Now when I read that

I think – OK, that's awkward

That doesn't really apply to today at all

Worshipping created things

Sure, we do that

And I know that Paul didn't have iPhones or Beyonce or something to point out

But birds and reptiles?!?

But catch this - when you look at *your* Bible

What language is it written in?

(This is not a trick question) English, right?

As you may know, the original Bible wasn't written in English

The New Testament was written in Greek

And the Old Testament was written in Hebrew

So when Paul read *his* Bible

What language was *it* written in?

Similarly,

The New Testament letters that were circulating were written in Greek

And His Old Testament was written in... Greek

It was called the Septuagint

You can find it online if you're interested

You don't need to know that

Just know that they read the Bible translated in their language *then*

Just as we do today

Why does that matter

Well - when you read Romans 1:23

Notice some of the key Greek words:

(They) exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images [images - eikonos] made to look like [likeness - homoomati] a mortal human being [mankind - anthropou] and birds [birds - peteinon] and animals and reptiles [reptiles - herpeton]. – Romans 1:23

That's not random

When you compare it to Genesis 1:26

In the Greek Septuagint that the Roman church would have read

And that Paul would have read

You see a lot of similarities:

Then God said, “Let us make mankind [*mankind - anthropou*] in our image [*images - eikonos*], in our likeness [*likeness - homoomati*], so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds [*birds - peteinon*] in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures [*reptiles - herpeton*] that move along the ground.” – Genesis 1:26

What’s he doing here?

He’s intentionally referring back

To say God had an original intent

At Creation

And mankind

Because of sin

Was departing from that original intention

They were worshipping created things

Rather than the Creator

Do you see that?

This is intentional

This is not an accident

They exchanged the glory of immortal God

For something else

What’s that look like?

He tells us in verse 24

Read Romans 1:24

One example of this exchange

From God’s original intent

To mankind's broken counterfeit

Is in sexuality

God designed sex

To be between one man and one woman within the covenant of marriage

From the beginning of the Bible to the end

This is the Biblical standard

One man – one woman – inside the covenant of marriage

In fact:

There's 1,189 chapters in the Bible

31,102 verses

66 books

By 35 different authors

And you never read one time

Where God diverts from this original intent

One man – one woman – inside the covenant of marriage

There's never one exclusion

One man – one woman – inside the covenant of marriage... unless they really love each other

One man – one woman – inside the covenant of marriage... unless they're committed

Other verses do provide exclusions

Like Jesus says divorce is sinful

Except in the case of adultery

You never see that in this discussion

Sex is always limited, Biblically, to one man – one woman – inside the covenant of marriage

Jesus speaks to this

And notice *how* He does it

They asked Him about marriage in Matthew 19

And He says this:

Matthew 19:4-5 - "Haven't you read," He replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'"

"The two will become one flesh"

Sexuality – Biblically speaking – is reserved for

One man – one woman – inside the covenant of marriage

There's not... a single... exception

Read Romans 1:25

"Creator" – more of that original intent language

So not only has humanity diverted from God's original intent in sexuality (verse 24)

But also in materialism and greed

Consumerism (verse 25)

"They worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator"

Read Romans 1:26-27

Sexuality (verse 24)

Materialism & greed (verse 25)

Homosexual activity (verse 26-27)

I'm not going to go into a lot of this here

Because I don't want to confuse the issue

But many of the people

False teachers, I believe

Who are twisting these verses to confuse people

Say that Paul is speaking about older men abusing children

Or they say its referring to prostitution

Or sex slavery

All of which, we would agree, should be labeled sinful

But that's not what this says

"They were inflamed with lust for one another"

Do you see that?

This is not describing a one-sided, abusive situation

And sometimes people will say

Well, they didn't know about any of this back in Bible times

They didn't know about orientation

They didn't have monogamous same-sex relationships

Can I respectfully say that that's factually not true

You're being misled

And I'm upset about it

Not at you

Not at you – but at them

And they'll have to stand before God for that

Let me give you just a couple examples – quickly:

In Plato's Symposium

Written in 375BC

Plato has a character who describes how sexual orientation came to be

In 375 BC

He says that Zeus divided people into 3 different categories:

Male – Female – Mixed

And according to Plato

Each group would seek out their other half

Men would seek out a woman to be their soulmate

Women would seek out a man to be their soulmate

And the mixed group would seek out someone of the same sex to be their “other half”

This was 375 years before Christ

They understood orientation

Emperor Nero

We talked about him a bit last week

He had just become the emperor when Paul wrote Romans

Nero was married four times

The first two marriages were to women

The last two were to men

His second husband we would describe today as trans

Sporus dressed in public as a Roman empress

Even though he was a man

Ecclesiastes 1:9 says that “there is nothing new under the sun”

And yet – catch this:

Paul

Who was later executed *by Nero*

Because he would not stop preaching the Gospel

Said that humanity diverted from God’s original intent in sexuality (verse 24)

Materialism & greed (verse 25)

Homosexual activity (verse 26-27)

Verse 28

Read Romans 1:28

And in case there’s any of us who don’t find ourselves tempted sexually, materialistically, or with same-sex attraction

He continues:

Read Romans 1:29-32

He didn't miss a one of us

All of us are on this list

My sin is in Romans 1 a couple times

Now listen

If you have same-sex desires

I am so glad that you're here

I really mean that

If this discussion today made you feel less than

It wasn't intended to

And I personally apologize if my tone

Or some stray word

Betrayed the nature of the text

If your same-sex desires make you feel bad and in need of a Savior

I have good news for you

Jesus loves you enough to be tortured and killed

To literally take up His Cross

To fill the need that you have

And the need that I have

And the need that every other person in this room has

You are not less than

You *are* imperfect

Just as I am

And you are loved

No more – no less than I am

And there is a savior

And a church

Who longs to walk along with you

As you submit your life and direction and desires to Jesus
To deny yourself
To take up your cross – each day
And follow Him

Now if you're here and don't have same-sex desires and don't feel bad and in need of a Savior
I have some bad news for you

Pride is listed as a sin in the Bible much more often than homosexual actions are

The Bible, multiple times, says that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble

“There is absolutely no room for moral pride here. It’s an offense both to Paul and to the cross of Christ to look down your spiritual nose at the homosexual acts in Romans 1 and ignore your own greed, slander, envy, covetousness, and judgmentalism, which are also mentioned in Romans 1. As Christians, we’re all a bunch of beggars trying to show other beggars where to find bread.” – Dr. Preston Sprinkle

Let me talk a second about why this is so important... to me
And then also about what I would encourage you to do

If you

Or a family member or friend wrestle with this

I'd love to meet anyone for coffee and talk through this

But some of you

Because Christians have too often been judgmental and prideful

Will not be willing to risk that

I get it

So I want to take just a second and give you a little bit of what I would say if we met

First – why is this so important

I've seen this happen far too many times over the last few years

So let me draw it out for us

So you have the words of God

And you read those words through a lens

Scholars call it a hermeneutic

That's a fancy theological word

It just means the systematic way you interpret Scripture

It's your lens

And that hermeneutic consistently teaches

Sex is reserved for one man and one woman inside the covenant of marriage

Let's talk a second about WellSpring's hermeneutic

We have four parts to it

And they inform us greatly in this discussion:

Jesus is Lord

Matthew 28:18 – Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to Me.

That means He's in charge

If you're not a Christian

I'm not judging you

Or telling you what to do

But if you claim the name of Jesus

You have to submit your life and choices and desires to Him

Because He's your King

Look at this powerful passage from Numbers 15

Numbers 15:37-40 – The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel.

You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the Lord, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by chasing after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes.

Then you will remember to obey all my commands and will be consecrated to your God.

You & I must read the Bible

Remembering that Jesus is our Lord

And that means He's in charge

God is love

God is love

I apologize on behalf of the church

Not specifically WellSpring

But the Church

The tone of this conversation has not been consistently loving

NT Wright – “Our problem at the moment is that we are not having a debate - we are simply having bits and pieces of a shouting match.”

I hope I came across as loving today

I'm sure I came across blunt at times

I wanted to be clear

Clear is kind

But I sure hope you sense humility

Because I personally am in desperate need of a Savior

Just like any of you

And I hope you sensed love

Because I know how valuable each of you are

My King

Surrendered His life

No one took it from Him

Because He values each of you so highly

Jesus' brother James reminds us:

James 1:19b – Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

As opposed to slow to listen – quick to speak – quick to anger

One of the real problems has been that we've tried to oversimplify this issue

Anytime you take a topic

That's not particularly a challenge for you

But is a challenge for someone else

And you present it simplistically

You maybe correct and wrong at the very same time

Let's take it out of this realm all together for a minute

I need to lose about 25 pounds

Don't everybody correct me at once

(simple: eat less, eat healthier, exercise more – simple)

Listen - If someone told me

Feeling as I do

That I could only marry men

And that being attracted to women was wrong / unnatural

That would be a very difficult situation for me to endure

It would require a tremendous amount of faith

And a tremendous amount of love and support from those around me

And when heterosexual Christians see this issue as cut and dry and easy

And especially when they do that while they unrepentantly watch pornography and sleep with their girlfriend

They undermine the struggle

That is very real for their gay brothers and sisters

We must read the Bible through a loving lens

Because God is love

Jesus came full of grace & truth

You know, we sometimes act like grace and truth

Pull & push against each other

Like if we are a little more graceful

We have to be a little less truthful

Or if we're a little more truthful

We have to be a little less graceful

Jesus was 100% both

John 1:14 – The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and Truth.

Jesus was so consumed by Truth that in John's Gospel

It actually refers to Him as "The Word"

Jesus is the sum total – the consummation - of Truth

But at the same time – Jesus was the most approachable man in history:

He forgave the woman caught in adultery

When everyone else wanted to stone her

He accepted the 5x divorcee at the Well

And she felt so loved that she brought the whole town out to meet Him

When giving arguably His greatest teaching – the Parable of the Prodigal Son

He has the lead character waste all of his father's money on prostitutes

In fact – Jesus told that story

Go back and read it for yourself

Jesus told that story in response to the mutterings of the religious leaders:

(They) muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." (Luke 15:2)

I just picture Jesus saying

"Yeah, I do... and I'm going to continue to!"

Jesus was full of grace and Truth

The Bible is right

Whatever your thoughts are about this discussion

Our basis for understanding

If you consider yourself a follower of Jesus

Is the authority of God's Word

You might disagree with another person over what the Bible is saying

You might even disagree with me!

But may it be true of us that when we disagree

Our discussions

And our disagreements

Are tethered to Scripture under the authority of Jesus

You & I may not always be right, but the Bible... is... right

This is important

Because we take the Word of God

And we run it through our lens

Our hermeneutic

And it gives us a standard to live by

But so many Christians today

Don't agree with this standard

They want a different outcome

They want an affirming outcome

The problem is

God's Word hasn't changed

Culture has changed

Our world's beliefs & values have changed

But God remains the same

And His Word remains the same

So if we're going to get *this* to say *that*

We have to change our lens

And when you change the lens

You don't just change the way you view the Scriptures relating to this topic

You change the way you view the Scriptures relating to *every* topic

And in pretty short order

I've seen it happen again and again

People who do that

Go into a deconstruction mode

Where their whole faith gets unraveled

Look at these words from Jesus' brother Jude:

Jude 1:3 - Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people.

Contend for your faith, friends

If you read Jude

You'll see that he says this as an introduction to talk about false teachers

He says, contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people.

For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. – Jude 1:4

He says these false teachers will try to twist your faith

And there will be two results:

A license for immorality

And a denial of Christ

Not a denial of Christ like He doesn't exist

A denial of Christ as "our only sovereign and Lord."

A deconstructed faith

And man, I see that today

When we don't contend for the faith

Immorality comes in

And faithlessness right behind it

That's why this is important

The topic is important

But even more important than the topic

Is the faith we have in the clear teachings of Scripture

And our trust in God

Even when culture tells us it's outdated or irrelevant

Let me wrap up by speaking just a moment to people

Who are wrestling with this temptation

Or frankly, any temptation

Here's the way culture tells us to embrace our feelings

We move from fantasy – our private thought life
--

To identity – where this behavior now represents who I am
--

To fulfillment – where I pursue those feelings

Fantasy *to* identity *to* fulfillment

I was listening to a speaker

Describing his own journey this week

Distanced from his dad / step-dad

Lived with his mom & sister

Not good at sports

Smaller than many of the other boys

One day, he asked himself - "Maybe I'm gay... maybe that's my true identity"

He didn't pursue that line of thinking

Today – he's happily married

A pastor

An online influencer

But it reveals how confusing identity can be

And then if this is my identity

And my behavior flows out of that identity

Then if someone rejects my behavior choices

They're rejecting me

They're showing hatred to me

Because I've allowed that to become who I am

Not just what I do

Listen to me - our only true identity is found in Jesus Christ

Everything else will let you down

As an ultimate source of identity

You are created in the image of God

You are loved and valued dearly by your Father in Heaven

And you are – who He says you are

Not who the world says you are

Fantasy *to* identity *to* fulfillment

How does that compare to the way of Jesus?

In Scripture, the first step

As we consider our feelings and desires

Is Repentance – turning to God

1 Corinthians 10:13 - No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

Take your feelings to God

And if those desires are contrary to Scripture

Step 2 is self-denial –

Mark 8:34-37 - Then He called the crowd to Him along with His disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me and for the Gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

Part of discipleship

For all of us

Is self-denial

And Jesus teaches - contrary to what the world tells us

You will find true fulfillment

Life, Jesus says

On the other end of self-denial

We repent

We deny ourselves

And we walk in humble obedience to Christ

You know, we just read Jesus' words from Mark 8:34-37

Deny yourself – take up your cross – follow me

I was copying & pasting that verse into my notes from my Bible software

And I happened to notice the next verse

Verse 38

It's powerful

And significant for today's message

In today's culture

In verse 38, Jesus continues:

If anyone is ashamed of Me and My Words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when He comes in His Father's glory with the holy angels. (Mark 8:38)

Confession...

Compound word – “speak” “with”

Repent – confess – immerse all of who you are into my way of living