



# Are We Living Out Romans 1?

BLESSING AND CURSE IN A POST-OBERGEFELL WORLD



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Guest Contributor

I was 35 years old, called myself a lesbian, and worked as an activist and English professor in New York when I first encountered these words from Romans 1:

*God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*

For this reason, *God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.*

(Romans 1:24–28)

Huh, I muttered. Seems like dangerous hate speech or some other devastation designed to ruin my life. God's word brought me to a line in the sand and a hole in my heart.

# What I Called Love

After many years and much struggling, God used the words of Romans 1 as he led me to repentance and faith. Through the crucible of conversion, I learned that the central thrust of this passage required eyes of faith. What I called love for my lesbian partner, God called defilement.

When God gives a people over to sin, we seem to go blind and deaf and dumb all at once, therefore [Romans 1:24–28](#) is of indispensable importance to the doctrine of the gospel. And yet, of these very same verses, gay activist and progressive self-described “Christian” Matthew Vines writes, “This passage is not of central importance to Paul’s message in Romans” (*God and the Gay Christian*, 96).

So, which is it? Are these verses inconsequential? Are they God’s love and his offer of life? Should these verses have confronted my homosexuality (and presumably Vines’s)? Or are these verses just “meh”?

## Romans 1 for Me Today

As I am typing these words today, having now walked with my Lord and Savior for 21 years, Romans 1 continues to impact my life.

The Bible first confronted me in the welcoming living room of Ken and Floy Smith, a pastor and pastor’s wife who befriended me as their neighbor. Floy has gone on to be with the Lord, but Ken continues as my father in the Lord, offering frequent counsel and encouragement. Ken Smith just wrote these words in an email to me this morning:

We had no idea what all would result from that enjoyable evening there in the Syracuse manse. And it’s still resulting.

Yes, it is still resulting. Because the word of God is living and active. Because God’s salvation fundamentally changes a person from the root. Because God changes the affections of our heart and the work of our hands.

Even though we are not delivered from all sin until glory, sanctification is a mighty thing, even when it is messy and painful and confusing. And all of this raises the question, What does Romans 1 look like today? What does it mean today?

## Where Does Homosexuality Come From?

*Romans 1 defines for us what homosexuality is and explains why some people give themselves over to it.*

We live in a world awash in preferred pronouns and sensitivity training for “sexual minorities” whose “variance” is normalized and celebrated. While the numbers change (and grow), we are told with bold confidence that “science” proves that a certain percentage of people are born gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered. (Sometimes this leaves thinking people scratching our heads. When did sexual orientation become a fixed truth but sexual difference merely a psychological choice, changeable at the beckon of the surgeon’s knife? But I digress.)

In Romans 1, homosexuality is described as an ethical outworking of original sin. Adam's fall into sin (Genesis 3) violated the terms of God's covenant and plunged all of his progeny into total depravity (Romans 5:8). Thus, biblically-speaking, homosexual desire is not a benign human variance, but rather, a condemning consequence of Adam's fall.

Romans 1:26 tells us that people give themselves over to homosexuality because they worship and serve the creation. Therefore, from God's point of view, homosexual practice is the sexual display of false worship. Well-heeled Gay Pride marches, with big-money corporate sponsors smiling in solidarity with the LGBTQ machine, give us a modern-day picture of what worshiping the creature looks like.

## HOMOSEXUALITY AS JUDGMENT

In addition to worshiping the creature, homosexuality is also a manifestation of the judgment of God on a rebellious nation (Romans 1:26). There is nothing innocent or scientifically morally neutral about the growing number of people who call themselves gay or the children who are diagnosed with "ROGD" (Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria), and who believe that genital mutilation is their only hope.

ROGD is not an intersex medical condition; it is a social contagion, disproportionately affecting teenage girls. At a speaking event a year ago, the head psychologist of a large university health clinic asked me this question: "Why are 25% of the women who come into my health clinic with anxiety and depression walking out three months later telling me that they are really transgendered men?" Indeed. Because we, as a culture, have not heeded the clear teaching in Romans 1, young people do not know how to interpret the cavernous pain that they feel inside when they worship the creature and the creation.

Like a fatigued mountaineer plunging headfirst off of a snowy summit loses his grip on which way is up, so too, fallen man rails against the creation ordinance. In blindness and sin, he rejects one man and one woman coming together in a fruitful biblical marriage. Not diverse enough, he says in the face of God's judgement.

## How Does Hardening Work?

*The three exchanges of Romans 1 reveal important things about the power of sin.* Romans 1 not only tells us what homosexuality is from God's point of view, but also the process by which a person and a society lose both ability and privilege to hear God's voice speak into their lives. This happens in degrees, by a series of exchanges. Each exchange deadens the conscience and sears the soul.

Romans 1:23–28 reveals interrelated exchanges that we need to examine: exchanging glory for corruption (1:23), exchanging knowledge of God for falsehood (1:25); and exchanging the creation ordinance for a dysfunctional sexuality that is "contrary to nature" (Romans 1:26–28). Don't miss the progression: the first exchange is glory for corruption; the second is truth for lies; and the third is natural relations (life-giving) for unnatural relations (death-producing).

Idolatry changes (your) glory into (global) corruption, regardless of your intention. Neither sin nor grace is private; each manifests world-changing meaning and consequence.

The person who changes his glory into corruption is called a fool. He had something irreplaceably precious. It was his glory, inherited from God through the supreme dignity of being made in God's image. Like a heroin addict who craves what will kill him and disdains what will give him life, the fool cannot stop himself or help

himself once he has changed his glory. Idolatry is voracious. And fools not only love company; they demand it ([Romans 1:32](#)).

This is the Bible's witness on homosexuality, our nation's reigning idol. From the point of view of individual homosexuals, of which I was once one, this is not how it feels. But from God's omniscient and holy point of view, this is what it means.

These three exchanges serve as a parallel to the three kinds of sin that capture our hearts: original sin leaves us with a desire for that which God hates, actual sin hardens our heart and darkens our soul with each transgression, and indwelling sin traps us into thinking that we cannot mortify a sin that dwells within us because this sin is indistinguishable from who we are.

The father of sin is Satan, and Satan is speaking in every sin that we commit. Our job is to talk back to temptation with Scripture, to conform our minds to God's point of view, to pray for deliverance from sin with intense love for God, not leaving our prayer time until we have grabbed hold of the power of heaven and received God's redemptive grace to prevail over sin and temptation. This requires faith in Christ, the King of Kings, and much of it. Praise God that he loves to give us faith and more faith!

## How to Live in a Post-Obergefell World

*Obergefell vs. Hodges* was the June 2015 Supreme Court decision that legalized gay marriage in all fifty states. Obergefell ushered in a new world, one where the fragmented LGBTQ community on the margins became the unified LGBTQ machine calling the shots from the center.

Three things resulted: (1) Obergefell codified the idea that sexual orientation is a category of personhood; in reality, sexual orientation is a category mistake that comes from Sigmund Freud. (2) Obergefell expanded civil rights to include protecting the dignity of someone who identifies as LGBTQ; the vague and subjective nature of this legal language has contributed to a world where hurt feelings reign supreme. (3) Obergefell put religious liberty on the firing line, as it pitted the teaching of the Bible against the teaching of the Supreme Court. After Obergefell, LGBTQ is now "who" you are, not only "how" you feel.

Romans 1 offers insight into how we shall live in this post-Obergefell world. First, we shall not be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, "for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" ([Romans 1:16](#)). And second, "the just shall live by faith" ([Romans 1:17](#); [Habakkuk 2:4](#)).

### UNASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL

When we live unashamed of the gospel, we do not live by the sword. This is not merely a political debate. This is spiritual warfare.

We believe that God's elect people are everywhere, and can be pulled out of any sin pattern into a righteous life by the work of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. No matter how lost someone appears, we know where there is life and hope. We know that the gospel comes with offense, and while we do not relish offending anyone, we understand that gospel offense pricks hearts and minds in order to draw sinners to Christ. The offense of the gospel is our wakeup call to reality.

When we live unashamed of the gospel, we apply God's appointed means of grace with consistency and intensity. We look out for people whose loved ones identify as LGBTQ, knowing that many, many people in the LGBTQ world are prayed-for children. Their faithful parents need our love and help and fellowship, not scorn or rejection or suspicion. We pray with Bibles open, feasting on the word of God, reading whole books at a time, and memorizing as much as we can.

God can deliver, and does deliver, people out of homosexuality by the power of his grace and Christ's work on the cross — people like me.

## LIVING BY FAITH

When the just live by faith, they put more stock in God's providence and God's character than in their own individual point of view.

We first see this phrase "the just shall live by his faith" in the book of Habakkuk. The prophet Habakkuk lived during the Babylon invasion. This book begins with Habakkuk pouring out his heart to God, begging God to do something with his defiant and ungodly people. The charges that Habakkuk brings against God's people are serious: they defy God's law and the wicked are ruling over the nations ([Habakkuk 1:4](#)). Does any of this sound familiar?

God answers Habakkuk by telling him not to worry because he has a plan: the Babylonians will soon capture God's people and this will put an end to this problem. Habakkuk is stunned and horrified. He pleads with God to spare his people. He tells God that the Babylonians are far worse than them. He questions God's divine wisdom. God then explains to his prophet that he is using the evil Babylonians to teach his people that the "just shall live by his faith" ([Habakkuk 2:4](#)). Through trial and confusion and heartache and pain, Habakkuk learns what it means that the just shall live by his faith.

Likewise, we learn how the just shall live by faith through trial and heartache and pain and confusion. When the just live by faith, they trust God not only with their soul, but also with all of the details of their lives. When the just lives by faith, the Lord cleans house. God's people learn not to rely on their own understanding, and how to live in the means of his grace he appoints. We feast and feed off of God's word. We pray and fast. We appeal to God to bring revival. We repent of sin openly. We gladly and persistently gather with God's people. We live in a constant posture of humility, forgiveness, and hospitality. We don't despise the cross.

## Need of Sinful Man

Homosexuality is a serious sin. It ranks with the sins that attack the creation ordinance. While the blood of Christ is more powerful than the power of any sin, while grace is stronger than any sin, a sexual sin that attacks a creation ordinance warps both the mind, body, and soul of a person. Sexual sin lures others into its trap. And a sin that now has civil rights backing acts as a powerful bully, punishing the righteous as it rewards the sinful.

In the face of this, we must remember that the word of God alone meets the need of sinful men. The grand narrative of Scripture provides a means of God's grace while calling all image-bearers to a standard of duty and truth. This living and active, double-edged sword continues to interpret and defeat the idols of every age

and of every generation, including today's reigning idol of homosexuality. The Bible has a birthright and a progeny totally different from every other book on the planet.

## How Homosexuals Use the Bible

But how have we come to this place where the clear sin of homosexuality seems to be threatening the church? Why are people twisting and bending the Bible in order to defend errant readings of it? Why is the clay calling the Potter to recant? Why are whole denominations going apostate? Why didn't the LGBTQ world remain a secular discourse that orbited outside of the church? Why has homosexuality transformed itself into a self-proclaimed moral good, remaking the Bible on its terms?

A.W. Pink in a little book entitled *Profiting from the Word* has insightfully commented that the word of God, when read the wrong way and for the wrong reasons, issues "no spiritual profit," but instead provides "a curse rather than a blessing." What is the right way to "profit" from God's word, so that it serves as a blessing rather than a curse? Pink says that you can only profit from God's word if it

1. convicts you of your sin,
2. leads you to sorrow over your sin,
3. draws you to confess your sin,
4. develops in you a deeper hatred of your indwelling sins,
5. causes you to forsake your sins,
6. fortifies you against sin, and
7. compels you to practice the opposite of your sin.

Because the word of God is divine revelation and a groundswell of supernatural power, it can conquer your sin.

Progressive "Christians" and gay-rights activists have claimed that the Bible is on their side. They interpret the Bible to call sin *grace* and grace *sin*. Like the false prophets Jeremiah warns against, who "heal the hurt of my people slightly" ([Jeremiah 6:14](#)), the false gospel of gay Christianity cannot bring true peace (which requires repentance and faith), but can only bring momentary and fleeting cessation of war. Instead of using the Bible to anchor our fickle hearts in Christ, the Bible is bent and twisted in the hands of gay-activist "Christians" to serve our wicked hearts. In the hands of gay-rights activists who call themselves progressive Christians, the Bible becomes a curse.

Because of this Bible-twisting, I have recently been called by gay Christians to repent of my repentance of homosexuality. Why? Because if homosexuality is not a sin, then my repentance of it is. In a post-Obergefell world, any debate over homosexuality is never a debate simply over homosexuality. The issue is the infallibility, inerrancy, and sufficiency of Scripture.

## True Christian's Best Guide

Practicing homosexuals — of which I was once one — may not be conscious of the larger, biblical meaning of their sin as outlined in Romans 1, but it would be to their betterment if they were. While the LGBTQ world

has become a machine, many individual people who practice homosexuality just want to be left alone to live in peace. But there is no lasting peace in sin, even for the unbeliever.

Listening to the challenges of people who identify as LGBTQ (as well as the praying parents that stand behind them) can be helpful if it allows you to meet them where they are with the gospel that changes minds, wills, affections, and allegiances. Biblical counseling and faithful preaching that breaks our hearts on the Rock of Christ is crucial to this conversation, as is kindness and genuine care for the well-being of others. But Romans 1 is the true Christian's guide as we seek to live for Christ in this post-Obergefell world. A person's well-being is never disconnected from truth, because truth is not only true, it is better, it is beautiful, it is ethical, and it is lovely.