

WAYS OF THE WICKED

By Ron Harvey

Text: Romans 1:18-32

INTRODUCTION

We have been studying the doctrines of salvation and most recently we had a whole series on sanctification. Now sanctification is the process by which God makes us to be what we should be. He takes a very unholy lump of clay and by his power and processes he makes it a holy lump of clay. He takes a very trembling sinner and makes him a confident saint. And if we had to sum up our duty as Christians, I think we could sum it up in four words, “Be imitators of Christ.”

And God takes mere sinners who are total opposites of Christ, and when he is finished with his work, he will have made them like Christ. That is the great power of God. Not only is God powerful to impute his righteousness to sinners, he is also powerful to impart his righteousness to sinners. God doesn't legally justify us and then leave us wallowing in sin forever. But he changes us to be like Jesus.

You see, God first saves us from the penalty of sin. That is, he justifies us. This is all a legal matter. Upon our simple faith in Jesus, God declares us to be righteous. And he takes our guilt away by a legal declaration.

God says, “I declare that sinner Abraham to be righteous by faith. I declare David, adulterer and murderer, to be righteous. I declare Paul of Tarsus, chief of sinners, to be righteous. I declare Peter who denied me three times to be righteous.”

Other sinners stand condemned in their sins and God never declares them righteous.

But unto his elect, there comes a time when God brings them to faith and God says, “I declare you righteous. You are set free from the penalty of sin.”

Now if God stopped there and never did anything else for us, at least we would be out from under condemnation. We would be out of the courtroom and we would be righteous in the eyes of the law. And we could breathe a heavy sigh of relief.

Example: Have you ever watched a defendant in that moment when the jury says, “Not Guilty.” There is often a heavy sigh as the weight of the world falls off his shoulders. He has been declared not guilty in the eyes of the law.

And when God forgives our sins and declares us righteous, we also breathe a sigh of great relief when we know that we are set free from the penalty of sin.

Ah, but this is just the beginning of our salvation, because God shall also set us free from the power of sin.

You see, if God has justified you, he will sanctify you by and by.

Now this is a hard work – to transform a sinner into a saint, to tear down those old habits and patterns and to build a new way of life. But God is a master builder and he will do it.

Example: Now on the television show, *Extreme Home Makeover*, the host of the show finds a family whose home is in utter disrepair. Sometimes it is literally falling down. And the family has had some tragic circumstance in their life and they cannot help themselves. And the host finds them and promises to build them a new house. And they don't try to repair the old house. They simply bring in the bull dozers and knock the old house down and they start fresh and build a new home.

And this is what God does. He will tear down that old house of sin. He will make you sick of those old habits. He will make sin to seem like an unbearable burden for you. And he will bring you low at times until you cannot continue on in sin any longer. And he will cause you to look with utter shame upon your own sinful condition. And he will bring in his bulldozer, operated by his Holy Spirit, and he will begin to tear down that old house of sin and shame. Board by board he will knock it down. And if you are harboring bitterness and resentment he will knock down that wall. And he will knock down the wall of anger and hate. And he will pull apart the boards of self-righteousness and conceit until they crumble to the ground in a heap. And all the sinful materials that made up that old, rotting house will be hauled away. And God will build a new house. And that is sanctification.

You see, God doesn't simply impute his righteousness to us, he imparts it as well. He doesn't just do a work outside of us, but he does something inside of us as well. And he will tear down that old home with its lusts and selfish desires, and he will build us a lovely new home, a home that will be fashioned with Christ-like qualities. And he will start with a most solid and sure foundation. And that foundation is none other than Jesus himself. Our new life will be built upon Him and his Word. And our new life will never be shaken because the foundation is sure. And the structure of this home will be made of the most beautiful materials. These materials are the very qualities of Christ himself. And each board in this home is a wonderful quality of Jesus and they are all joined together into a super structure. There is the framework of truth, knowledge and wisdom. And then there are the walls of humility, meekness, mercy, grace, loveliness, gentleness. All through this new house is woven such qualities as boldness, courage, loyalty, determination and purity. And we could go on and on. Your new house will be made of all the qualities of Jesus.

And that is the process of sanctification. God is building you a new way of life.

So, God takes that old sinful man and he has to clean out all the rotteness and replace it all with Christian graces.

Now the sermon this morning concerns not so much the new building but the old one. And I have entitled the message, Ways of the wicked. And these are ways that once characterized our lives. And these ways must be torn down. They must be torn down brick by brick until there is nothing left of them. And a part of sanctification is tearing down this old house.

Ephesians 4:22 puts it this way.

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

You will notice here that there is a putting off and then a putting on. And that old man must be put off so that the new man can be put on. Now it makes sense that if we are to put on holiness, then we must put off unholiness. If we are to put on the truth, then we must put off lying. If we are to put on humility, then we must put off pride.

Now we have a long laundry list in Romans 1 of the ways of the wicked. And it is good to study these, because these are the ways which we must put off. These are the ways that stand in stark contrast to the ways of Christ.

You know, there is a very sharp distinction between the wicked and the righteous. And we must strive daily to make that distinction even more clear. Let us not be numbered among the wicked, but let us be counted with the righteous.

Now these are the characteristics of the wicked.

I. Suppression of the truth (v.18)

They hold the truth in unrighteousness.

One of the sharpest distinctions between the wicked and the righteous is what they do with the truth of God. When the truth of God enters the heart of the wicked, the truth is swallowed up in darkness. As we have seen in John 3:19,

Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

Now wicked men have the intellectual capacity to understand the truth. But they don't have the moral capacity. And it says they hold the truth in unrighteousness. That is, they twist and misshape and distort the truth of God in order to conform it to their unrighteousness. Rather than conform their behavior to the truth, they conform the truth to their behavior.

Example: Have you ever wondered how in the world people can completely distort the truth of God so that their sins appear acceptable? They can make the grossest sins appear to be acceptable to God.

And I wonder, are they reading the same Bible that I read? But somehow, it means something different to them. And the truth is suppressed in unrighteousness.

Example: If a wicked man is an adulterer, he will twist the Word of God and make it seem as though God accepts adultery.

Example: A wicked man will make an idol of his wealth and call it godliness, when God says, "The love of money is the root of all evil."

The righteous man will hear the truth and make every effort to conform his life to it. The wicked man will hear the truth and twist it to conform to his life.

I am hoping that here at Grace Baptist Church, we will take the Word of God very seriously and that we will bring our behavior into conformity with the truth and thus we will take our stand for God and against the wicked.

But notice the second characteristic of the wicked.

II. They do not glorify God. (v.21)

This is a great mark of the wicked. They would steal God's glory. They look up into the heavens and they see God's handiwork and they still refuse to give him his glory. They don't worship him as the Creator. In fact, the Gentiles in Paul's day, made images of man and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things and they bowed down and worshipped these creatures rather than worshipping God.

They dishonored him by worshipping many gods. They made images of various creatures and worshipped them. But God is highly dishonored when man worships many gods. There is only one God and that is the God who created all things.

They also dishonored him by worshipping things, when God desires spiritual worship. God much prefers a contrite heart to a ritual. But the wicked prefer any form of worship that does not require a contrite heart. External acts of religion always fit the bill for the wicked, because they don't have to bow the heart.

Note the stupidity and foolishness of the wicked. They would prefer to worship a creepy crawler than to worship the true God.

In fact, the wicked would prefer to use God's name as a curse word rather than to worship him. They trample his name and they blaspheme on a daily basis. And they act as though God is worthless rather than worthy. They treat him with dishonor rather than honor.

And this is ever the way of the wicked.

Not so the righteous. Their goal every day is to glorify God. That is their duty. And that is their desire. And they prefer to be dishonored so that God might be honored.

But let's go on to evaluate more ways of the wicked.

III. They are not thankful. (v.21)

Is this not also a great mark of the wicked? God gives them everything necessary for life and provides far more than what is necessary, and they are not thankful. Why, they barely acknowledge God's existence and when the day is over, they have no gratitude in their hearts for his care and provisions.

At the end of the day they say, "Look what my hands have done." And they are puffed up and proud, and self-righteous. But they are not thankful. Why, to bow their heads and give thanks would be the most foreign thing in the world to them.

And we are to put off this old man, for we were once unthankful. But now that Christ has made us new, we are to tear down this old habit of unthankfulness and to be thankful in all things.

IV. They became vain in their imaginations. (v.21)

Now this means simply that they engaged in empty reasonings.

Example: In my college days, I was required to take a basic Philosophy class. And in most philosophical discussions, the overriding assumption is that God does not exist. And I discovered that when that is the assumption, then all the reasonings are empty and useless. In fact, when the truth of God is taken out of the equation, the whole discussion turns into utter nonsense. If you assume that God did not create the world, then the discussions turn into vain disputes and foolish fancies and ridiculous speculations. If you assume that there is no moral obligation to a Creator, then all other theories of morality spin into play and they rest on nothing but thin air.

And this is the way of the wicked. Their reasonings are empty and foolish. They are based on nothing for they have rejected that solid foundation upon which true knowledge can be based.

V. They professed themselves to be wise. (v.22)

Did you know that nowhere is foolishness so evident than in the halls of human wisdom? They professed themselves to be wise. They were wicked and they rejected the truth of God. Nevertheless, they professed themselves to be wise.

Matthew Henry says that this verse casts a darkness upon human philosophers. He says that philosophers are pretenders to wisdom. And most of them are professors of philosophy. And that is so true. Philosophers are thought to be deep thinkers, great expositors of wisdom. But in the end it is human reasoning and it falls to pieces under the scrutiny of the Word of God.

There is one source of wisdom and that is God. And his wisdom is so far above human wisdom such that human wisdom is mere foolishness.

And this is the way of the wicked – they profess themselves to be wise.

Did you know that nowhere is the gospel more despised and scoffed at than in universities and in halls of learning?

Example: Paul took the gospel to those learned scoffers in Athens.

Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbling say? Other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

Acts 17:18

And this will forever be the way of the wicked. They profess themselves to be wise.

The righteous, on the other hand, care not so much for human reasoning, but prefer the absolute truth of the Word of God. Whereas the wicked profess themselves to be wise and become fools. The righteous profess themselves to be fools and become wise.

VI. They indulged in homosexuality. (v.24, 26, 27)

A. Homosexuality is in some sense a final stage of sin. (v.24, 26)

It is the natural conclusion of giving over to the lusts of the heart. Where the lust of the heart was previously confined to suppressing the truth and being unthankful and engaging in vain reasonings, now sin drags the sinner deeper into the pit.

Example: Sinners usually don't start their sinful careers by robbing a bank or murdering someone. But they start by telling a lie and by being selfish and by rejecting God. And then anger and bitterness take root. And they begin to dig deeper into the works of darkness. And sexual sins turn into sexual perversion. And there is a progression to their sin.

It can be seen here that homosexuality is a final stage of sin by the fact that God "gave them up" to it. Because of their sin, God gave them up unto further sin.

God is so gracious, even to the wicked. He typically restrains their sin so that humanity is spared to some extent the awful effects of sin. But there comes a time when God takes the controls off and he gives them up to become what fallen man is capable of becoming.

And in this passage, when he takes the restraints off, we see the level to which humanity falls - women with women and men with men.

Homosexuality is not an early stage of sin. It is a late stage of sin. And it is a terrifying stage of sin because it is a stage of God's judgment. He has given them up. And it is never good for sinners when God gives them up.

B. Homosexuality is called uncleanness. (v.24)

Women with women and men with men is not acceptable to God. It is called uncleanness. Uncleanness means dirty. And that is what God calls it. Now all sin is dirty. But, God chose to specifically call this sin unclean. And that's the way most of us react at the thought. We sort of cringe and we say, "That's nasty." And that is what God calls it. He says he gave them up to uncleanness.

C. Homosexuality is called dishonorable. (v.24)

The body is an honorable thing. It has a purpose and it is to be used for the purposes that God intended. And to the extent it is used for the proper purpose, that use is

honorable. But when the body is used in a way that God did not intend and in a way that he does not approve, then it is a dishonorable use of the body.

D. Homosexuality is called a vile affection. (v.26)

Vile means morally despicable or abhorrent. It means physically repulsive. And again this is not my word for it. This is God's word for it. God calls it a vile affection. Now if homosexuality offends me, how much more does it offend a holy God who created a man for a woman and a woman for a man?

And God says it is a vile affection.

This despicable practice of homosexuality was the most glaring iniquity of Sodom and Gomorrah. And God rained fire and brimstone down on them when their sin finally caused a stinch in his nostrils.

E. Homosexuality is called unnatural. (v.26)

Some things are clear even without special revelation. Even the light of nature teaches that homosexuality is wrong. Nature itself teaches us that there should be a man and a woman. That is why God says they changed the natural use into that which is against nature.

Even the animals of the field know the natural use.

How far has man fallen! We were made a little lower than the angels. But sin has buried us beneath the beasts and the critters. Even they know the natural use, but man in his rebellion and in his unnatural lusts, has sunk into abomination.

F. Homosexuality is called unseemly. (v.27)

“Unseemly” means not suitable or out of order – not appropriate.

Example: If a preacher were to curse, that would be unseemly. It is not really suitable to his profession and it is not appropriate.

Example: If a wife belittles her husband in public that would be unseemly.

And God says a man with a man and a woman with a woman is unseemly.

G. Homosexuality is called an error. (v.27)

God says homosexuality is not a correct answer. It is an error. He that engages in such an act has made an error. He has deviated from the correct path and has made a grievous mistake.

You see the wicked suppress the truth and they will convince themselves that

homosexuality is ok with God. And in fact, they will argue that it is good and correct and that they should be confirmed in their lifestyle by the passing of laws which give them legal status.

But even if we pass laws that give them legal rights and legitimize them according to human law, that doesn't change the fact that God says, "It is an error."

They did not like to retain God in their knowledge
They were filled with all unrighteousness.
They were filled with fornication.
They were filled with wickedness.
They were filled with covetousness.
They were filled with maliciousness.
They were full of envy.
They were full of murder.
They were full of debate.
They were full of deceit.
They were full of malignity.
They were whisperers.
They were backbiters.
They were haters of God.
They were spiteful.
They were proud.
They were boasters.
They were inventors of evil things.
They were disobedient to parents.
They were without understanding.
They were covenant breakers.
They were without natural affection.
They were implacable.
They were unmerciful.
They have pleasure in other sinners.

CONCLUSION

These are the ways of the wicked. And I hope we will take great care to put these things far from us.

We need to consider them and study them so that we are aware of what constitutes wickedness.

And we need to avoid them. If wickedness is found on a certain street, then we should travel another road. And if we have not yet put off wickedness from our hearts, then we need to lay it aside and put it far from us.

And lastly, we need to hate wickedness in every form. The ways of wickedness lead to destruction.