

Pandora's Box

The Banquet Table of Consequences – Part IX

Romans 1:28-32

Introduction

In Greek mythology, the god Prometheus stole fire from the chief god of the pantheon, whose name was Zeus. Prometheus then gave the fire to the race of men that he had created. Zeus became so furious with man for accepting the gift of fire that he decided to punish him and thus, created the first woman. Men, this is only mythology, right? Ladies, this is only mythology, right? Men, it would be good for you to be louder in your answer than the women!

Zeus named the first woman Pandora. He did not just create a woman, however. In addition to this beautiful woman, he created an ornate, beautiful box and gave it to Pandora as a gift. He did not tell her though, that he had filled the box with all the evils, diseases, troubles, and disasters that would bring endless pain and suffering to the world. When he gave it to Pandora, he simply told her to never open it, for if she did, the result would be tragic.

Eventually, driven by curiosity, Pandora opened the box. Everything began to fly out. In horror, she attempted to close the box, but before she could get the lid back on, all of the evil, tragedy, and pain had been released. Everything had escaped the box, except one thing – as she quickly closed the box, she unknowingly left the only good thing trapped inside. Hope had been unable to escape and it was now forever trapped inside Pandora's box.

So, there was disease without hope of remedy; tragedy without hope of joy; pain without hope of relief; despair without hope of escape.

Pandora's box was a myth that was created in an attempt to explain the origin of evil and the despair of

mankind. In a very small way, the myth of Pandora's box is true.

Mankind is without hope. He is hopelessly wandering; hopelessly enslaved to tragedy and pain; hopelessly diseased and dying; hopelessly unfulfilled and in despair; hopelessly sinful, spiritually impoverished, and needy.

Why? Because, as Paul has explained to us in Romans, chapter 1, mankind refuses the remedy. Man refuses to know and follow after God; he swims away from the lifeboat; he throws away the antidote, which is Jesus Christ and His blood shed for our sin.

Instead, man would rather look within himself for the answer. He would rather believe in himself than in Christ. Man would rather place his faith in his own ability to create the cure for despair and guilt than look to the cross of Christ. And man lives out the myth – he has everything, it seems, but hope.

Paul said in Romans, chapter 1, verse 21b,

... they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

In other words, they cannot find the answer.

I was standing in the line at a grocery store recently, reading all the magazine titles that reveal the spiritual and moral wanderings of mankind. Oprah Winfrey's magazine caught my eye. The title of one article promised, "A Journey to the Center of Yourself". I bought the magazine, after looking around to make sure no one from church was there!

I never know anymore. I was buying a cup of coffee the other day, and the guy who served the coffee said, just as I was about to walk away, "Sure am enjoying your sermons."

I bought a sandwich, and the lady who sold it said, “I sure am enjoying your church.”

I took my daughter to the pool the other day, and the lifeguard said, “Hi, Pastor Davey.”

I don’t mind – it’s good for me. It keeps me polite and out of trouble!

I bought the Oprah magazine and was not surprised by the mixture of Christian terminology and Zen Buddhism; the humanism of self-empowerment and self-sufficiency mixed with the mention of Jesus.

Another article was entitled, “Take Your Freedom”. Some of the comments this author wrote were,

Your body is free but your heart is in prison. Our hearts are imprisoned for just one reason: the only language they can speak is truth. . . . Your heart tells it like it is, without bothering to be tactful or socially appropriate. Free hearts rock boats, break rules, do things that disrupt the system. All our lives we’ve been hearing things like: “What you are thinking/feeling/saying/becoming is rude, scandalous and sinful.” . . . but as the 13th century Zen master said, “The place is here; the way leads everywhere.” [In other words] the more you tune in, the deeper the truths your heart will tell . . . of course, your Inner Jailer might not agree.

As I read this article, it was quite clear to me that this Inner Jailer was the conscience. She goes on to write,

You may be flooded with reminders that your heart’s instructions are . . . rude. Don’t listen. Run . . . toward the fertile, gorgeous jungle of human imagination and possibility.

This is humanism, self-worship, and self-sufficiency. It is based on the lie that you are all-wise and capable of directing yourself, by your emotions and feelings, toward the path of truth and freedom.

Ms. Winfrey spent a weekend of silence and wrote about it in her article. She and some friends went to her farm for a weekend of silence. She brought along a yoga instructor for yoga, meditation, and lectures. It was basically a convoluted mixture of eastern religion and humanism. They were to find themselves and rediscover “the center” or wholeness.

Oprah completes her description of that weekend of yoga and silence by writing,

Our real power comes from knowing who we are . . . and that begins with looking inside ourselves in silence. I’ve always believed you really need no gurus, no leaders, no guides – just yourself. You have all your own best answers. What you’re trying to find is already there. Be still and know it.¹

She could not be more spiritually deceived.

The Bible does not say, “Be still and know ourselves,” but, in the King James Version of Psalm, chapter 46, verse 10a, it says,

Be still and know . . . God . . .

The Bible does not teach that our real power comes from within ourselves, for Jesus Christ said, as recorded in John, chapter 15, verse 5b,

. . . apart from Me you can do nothing.

The Bible also says, in Philippians, chapter 4, verse 13,

I can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me.

Our power and wisdom comes from Christ.

Are the answers to life deep within your heart? The Bible says, in Jeremiah, chapter 17, verse 9,

The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?

Ladies and gentlemen, because of sin and our fallen nature, wisdom is not within us, only sin, evil, and pride. Wisdom and truth must come from outside ourselves.

James did not write, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of his heart . . .”, but instead, in chapter 1, verse 5a, he wrote,

. . . if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously . . .

Do you want to know how to live? David wrote, in Psalm, chapter 119, verse 105,

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Do you want to have a free heart? Jesus Christ said, according to John, chapter 8, verses 31b through 32,

. . . If you continue in My word, . . .

(in other words, if you meditate on My word, not silence; if you focus on My word, not yourself; if you concentrate on My truth, not what your heart tells you to do . . .),

. . . then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

The truth is, man does not want freedom in Christ, he wants freedom from Christ. He does not want the wisdom of God, he wants wisdom without God.

To abandon God, Paul informs us, is to be abandoned by God to yourself, and, left to yourself, you will never generate anything other than speculation, futility, pride, and sin.

The consequences of refusing to follow after the God of the Bible are similar to Pandora's box being opened. As a result, every vile and sinful thing now becomes the potential experience of every person, and the heart that abandons God, finds everything but hope!

Review

The latter part of Romans, chapter 1, describes the consequences for hopeless humanity.

God gave mankind over to immoral defilement

1. God gave mankind over to immoral defilement.

In Romans, chapter 1, verse 24, we read,

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

God gave mankind over to immoral distortion

2. God gave mankind over to immoral distortion.

In Romans, chapter 1, verses 26 and 27, we read,

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

The Ultimate Expression of Depravity

So, first there was sexual defilement, and then sexual distortion, or the inversion of God's creative order.

God gave mankind over to immoral degradation

3. Then, God gave mankind over to immoral degradation.

The evil digression of rebellious society is revealed, as Paul delivers the third abandonment by God in Romans, chapter 1, verse 28.

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind . . .

In other words, they chose to ignore God; they did not see any worth in pursuing God any longer, so God gave their minds over to depraved thinking.

As one author wrote, "The human mind that considers God worthless becomes worthless."

I would add, "The person who has no purpose for God, condemns himself to a life without purpose."

Paul continues, in verse 28, to say,

. . . God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper

He will then list twenty-one sins, in verses 29 and 31. He begins verse 29 by saying,

being filled with all . . .

and follows this with a list of sins. Let us go through this list.

Twenty-one sins expressing mankind's depravity

1. *unrighteousness*

This is a categorical term that means, "despising whatever God loves and loving whatever God despises". It is the opposite of everything related to God's character.

2. *wickedness*

This is also a categorical term which could be defined, "totally bent toward corruption," that is, "corrupt in every purpose and way".

3. *greed*

This is "grasping for what you do not have," or, in other words, it is a craving for more of anything and everything. Our western system of economics is largely based upon greed. It does not thrive, unless we are convinced that we do not have enough.

4. *evil*

This is "a vicious delight in harming others". You could render the word, "malicious".

5. *full of envy*

There is a difference between envy and greed. While greed is “grasping for more of what you do not have,” envy is “grasping for what someone else already has”.

In Matthew, chapter 27, verses 17 and 18, Jesus is standing trial before Pilate, just before His crucifixion. The text reads, “So when the people gathered together, Pilate said to them, ‘Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?’ For he knew that because of envy they had handed Him over.”

The leaders wanted Jesus to die because, among other things, He had power, and they wanted it; He had popularity with and the attention of the people, and they hated Him for it. They wanted what He had – they envied Him.

6. *murder*

This is “the ultimate expression of selfishness”. Murder follows envy not only in this list, but also in life. It is the removal of a person who is causing someone misery, anger, or envy.

7. *strife*

This means “affection for arguing”. Some translations use the word “debate,” but that word does not denote the hatred and bitterness of this word, translated “strife”.

8. *deceit*

This means “luring others with sinful bait”. The original word literally, means, “fish bait”.

9. *malice*

This is practicing “viciousness as a way of life”. The Greek word is a compound word. The first part is “kakos,” meaning, “bad, evil,” like the English word “cacophony,” which means, “a bad sound”. The second part is “ethos,” meaning, “habit or custom”. Thus, this word means, “the habit of badness”. This is a person who is habitually vicious toward others, by the use of their hands; they are always hurting other people.

10. *they are gossips*

This is “one who ruins lives in secret,” and is a similar vice to malice. A malicious person uses his hands to hurt; a gossip uses his tongue to hurt.

Now Paul does not say, “they gossip,” but rather, “they *are* gossips,” which is the correct translation of the implication of the Greek word.

The Greek word for “gossip,” was created to sound like the very thing it describes. We have words like that in the English language; words like:

“slam,” “bang,” “crash,” “thump”. The word for “gossip,” in the Greek, is, “psithuristes,” which means, “whisperer”. A gossip, or whisperer, might say, “Pssst, have you heard?” or “Hey, have you heard.”

Gossiping is talking in private in such a way that another person’s reputation or character is ruined.

By the way, if you want to turn off a gossip, simply say, at the beginning of their conversation, “May I quote you?”

11. *slanderers*

Paul continues this list of sins in verse 30. This word means “one who ruins people in public”. While gossip is secret defamation, slander is public defamation of character. In fact, the word can be translated “defamer”.

12. *haters of God*

This is “one who attempts to ruin God’s reputation”.

It is interesting to me that after gossip and slander, this word is found. At first it seems out of order or out of place, but it actually fits well. The gossip and the slanderer speaks against the character of another person in an attempt to ruin their reputation; in the same way, this word refers to one who speaks publicly against God, and His church, in an attempt to ruin His reputation, and the reputation of His church.

13. *insolent*

This is “one who mixes pride with brutality”. This is the “bully,” the one who expresses his pride by beating up people.

Insolence is pride and cruelty. It is the perfect word for describing The World Wrestling Federation. Oh, excuse me, I did not mean to get so practical.

When I was a young boy, there was a bully in my neighborhood. He was bigger and stronger than the other boys in the neighborhood, and he knew it. He lived in a cul-de-sac around the corner from my house.

One day, when I was eleven or twelve years old, my friend and I decided to ride our bikes past his house and yell names at him; names such as, “Frankie is a meanie,” or “white washed sepulcher,” that fit Baptist parameters. I am sure the names were not very nice.

So, we did it, but in our sin of slander, we momentarily forgot that he lived in a cul-de-sac. We shouted those names toward his house as we rode our bikes in, instead of out. And Frankie, who had been

in the side yard, unknown to us, came barreling around the house after us before we even made the loop. He was incredibly fast. I will never forget the feeling of his hand on my shirttail. Yes, he caught me. He did not catch my friend Ronnie, whom I would have gladly sacrificed to him!

The truth was, I was a slanderer and he was insolent. Between those two sins however, at that moment, he had the better one.

I lived to tell this story only because my two younger brothers saw it happening and yelled to Mom, “Frankie’s got Stevie.”

Mom came racing out of the house, through the back yard, over a fence, and saved my life. I found out later that my brothers had only yelled for my Mother while sitting on that fence, so they could get a better view. They were selling popcorn and tickets to the show, saying, “This is great! Look at Stevie getting pummeled.”

My brothers will pay in the coming judgment!

The trouble is, some little boys never grow out of it; in fact, they never grow up. They still yell names at people, punch people, swerve in front of people, and demand their way with waitresses and retailers! They threaten people, push people, and holler their point of view. They show up at corporate board meetings and even church business meetings.

This is too convicting, let us move on!

14. *arrogant*

This is “a person with a pedestal personality”. This person is filled with himself and considers himself above everyone else, even God. He considers himself to be superior and regards others with contempt, as if they are unworthy of his time or interaction.

15. *boastful*

This is “the dialect of the arrogant”. In other words, this is the way a person who is filled with themselves speaks. Their chief subject of conversation is themselves. That is irritating to most people, isn’t it?!

Perhaps it is irritating because, as Vance Havner said, “An egotist is someone who talks so much about themselves that you don’t ever have a chance to talk about yourself.”ⁱⁱⁱ

This person will frequently manufacture things about themselves that are false, only to make themselves look better.

According to an article in *Newsweek Magazine*, Pulitzer prize winning author and teacher, Joseph

Ellis, was revealed as having lied about his military exploits in Vietnam, his role in the antiwar movement, and even his high school athletic record. He was featured in a widely circulated Boston newspaper and, as a result, someone, who knew his past, finally said something. At the time he claimed he was leading a platoon in Vietnam, he was in a classroom teaching history.ⁱⁱⁱ

The article went on to catalogue more instances of boasting in an article entitled, “The Great Pretenders”.

For years, Franklin Roosevelt claimed credit for writing a front page scoop in his university’s newspaper, *The Harvard Crimson*. He was later forced to admit that the story had been written by another student.

Douglas Ginsburg, the Supreme Court nominee who said he had taken thirty-four cases to court for the Justice Department, had, in fact, only taken one.

The list went on and on. Boastful people are inventors of tall tales to make themselves look good.

Boastfulness is rampant within the church, by the way. We imply spirituality, when we are not spiritual; we speak of praying, when we are not praying, and when we do, we make sure everybody knows it.

Charles Spurgeon said, “The average Christian can’t kill a mouse without it being published in the *Gazette*.”

We are boastful people. I wonder if the reason God does not do more through us, is because we are too busy patting ourselves on the back.

16. *inventors of evil*

These are people who are “committed to corrupt creativity”. They invent ways of doing evil things. While God is the creator of all things that are good, man is the creator of all that is evil.

For example: someone develops the idea of global communication through the Internet, and man invents a way to use it to peddle pornography; the world of fashion continually invents new ways to depict sensuality and provoke lust.

Sinful mankind is incredibly innovative with displaying, encouraging, promoting, legalizing, advertising, broadcasting, selling, and showcasing sin.

17. *disobedient to parents*

This is “refusing to accept God’s primary arrangement of authority and influence”. This addition to the list should strike fear into the heart of

every young person. It is intended to strike fear however, into the heart of every parent.

Disobedience is not a small thing to God; it is something He hates. It is to be no more tolerated in the life of a child than stealing, lying, malice, or any other sin listed in these verses.

I have heard children call their parents names and get away with it. I have seen little children stomp their foot and say, “No,” to Mom, and then, have heard Mom say, “Well, you know how children are.”

I know how children are – they are like little savages, who are born selfish, stubborn, and dishonest. God has given the parents the responsibility to civilize them. Parents cannot make children spiritual, but they can make them civil. And it begins by requiring obedience to you as a parent.

18. *without understanding*

Paul continues this list of sins further in verse 31. This is “an irreparable learning disability regarding spiritual things”. An unbeliever cannot discern spiritual things or matters, because, the Bible says, in I Corinthians, chapter 2, verse 14b, that, “. . . they are spiritually discerned.”

19. *untrustworthy*

This is “someone with whom a handshake is meaningless”.

These are men and women who make promises, but never keep promises. This includes, for example, not keeping appointments, not following through with responsibilities, signing contracts they will not keep, making marriage vows they will break, and even nations signing peace treaties, while knowing they will not follow them. Evil man says to one another, “We will do this or that,” knowing that they will not.

A society that abandons God will be filled with people who will abandon one another, if the price is right or the circumstances are convenient.

20. *unloving*

This is one who is “without a heart of affection”. This person is literally, “without natural affection; such as, between mother and child, children and parents.” This word characterizes the breakdown of the family unit.

One British physician suggests, “doing away with the family completely because it is a primary conditioning device for an imperialistic western world view.”

Kate Millet, a very prominent feminist, wrote a book entitled, *Sexual Politics*. She writes that, “the

family must go because it oppresses and enslaves women.”

A leader within the National Organization of Women, seeks to eliminate all marriage and all motherhood because, as she says, “Marriage is legalized servitude and family relations are the basis for all human oppression.”

The trouble is, these are the elitists of our day and they are teaching in our universities and schools. These are the views that are considered politically correct.

Paul calls it a distortion and a characteristic of rebellion and sin.

Dr. Armand Nicolai, of the Harvard Medical School, sees the trend to destroy the family as a devastating trend. He points to married women with children, who are working outside the home, the tendency for families to move frequently, almost constantly, the dominance of television in the home, the lack of controls in society, and the chaos of moral confusion as threatening the very life which we live. He writes,

These trends will incapacitate the family, destroy its integrity and cause its member to suffer such crippling emotional conflict that they will become an intolerable burden to society.

What does he say about the future?

First, the quality of family life will continue to deteriorate producing a society with a higher incidence of mental illness than ever before. [Society] will be characterized by a lack of self-control. Murder of people in authority will be a frequent occurrence. Crimes of violence will increase, even those within the family. The suicide rate will rise. As sexuality becomes more and more unlimited and separated from family commitment, the deadening effect will cause more bizarre experimentation and wide-spread perversion.^{iv}

21. *unmerciful*

It is interesting that the last characteristic of perverted, distorted, self-centered society is this word. This is a person who is “without a shred of compassion”. It could be translated, “ruthless”.

The biggest sport in Rome, which was the Gladiatorial games, characterized this. In these games, bloodthirsty people regularly watched people kill one another for the pleasure of the crowd.

These twenty-one words are the ultimate expressions of depravity. However, we have not reached the bottom of the sewer yet.

The Ultimate Endorsement of Depravity

Paul now describes the ultimate endorsement of depravity. Look at Romans, chapter 1, verse 32.

and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Let me summarize Romans, chapter 1, verses 26 through 32:

- Rejection of God leads to an – *acceptance* of sin.
- Acceptance of sin leads to the – *approval* of sin.
- Approval of sin finally degenerates into – *applause* for sin.

So, sin is accepted, then approved, and then applauded, by mankind without God.

One author wrote, “To justify one’s own sin is wicked enough, but to approve and encourage others to sin is immeasurably worse.”^v

The absolute depths of wickedness are reached, Paul says in this verse, when those involved in evil applaud and encourage others who do the same.

Thus, a person’s life is destroyed by sin, and society, as a whole, is destroyed and perverted by those who insist that sin is good, that evil is tolerable, and that immorality is the way to live.

The prophet Isaiah warned his generation and this generation, in chapter 5, verses 20 through 24, saying,

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight!

Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine and valiant men in mixing strong drink,

Who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the rights of the ones who are in the right!

Therefore, as a tongue of fire consumes stubble and dry grass collapses into the flame, so their root will become like rot and their blossom blow away as dust; for they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

In like manner, Paul, in the New Testament, has delivered the same warning. He has revealed God’s judgment on sin and sinners, as Romans, chapter 1, comes to a close. He has recorded the ultimate expressions of depravity and the ultimate endorsement of depravity.

The Ultimate Escape from Depravity

Now, what is the ultimate escape from depravity? Let me tell you the way.

- Admission – “I am a sinner, corrupt and proud.”
- Confession – “Lord, please forgive my sin. I confess to You, and make no excuses or defenses, I have found me in this list.”
- Submission – “Lord, I repent and turn from my heart’s yearnings and deceptions. I turn my life over to Your Spirit, the Giver of truth, to follow and obey Your Word, the true guide to pure and holy living.”

There is a way to escape sin and its resulting judgment.

Hope, by the way, did escape Pandora’s box. Hope has come, not in mythology, but in true theology; in the gospel of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

As I John, chapter 1, verse 9, tells us,

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The words of this song tell of the only way of escape from sin. Will you sing this?

*Just as I am, without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidst me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!*

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 7/1/2001 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Oprah Winfrey, "A Journey to the Center of Yourself," The Oprah Magazine (July, 2001).

ⁱⁱ Robert J. Morgan, Nelson's Complete Book of Stories (Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), p. 633.

ⁱⁱⁱ "The Great Pretenders," Newsweek Magazine, (July 2, 2001), p. 34.

^{iv} John MacArthur Jr., "A Plan For Your Family: God's vs. The World's," (Jan. 26, 2001).

^v John MacArthur Jr., Romans (Chicago, Moody Press, 1991), p. 109.