

Saltwater

The Banquet Table of Consequences – Part V

Romans 1:24

Introduction

Robert Lois Stevenson once wrote, “Every man shall one day be seated at a banquet table of consequences.”

In Romans, chapter 1, verses 24 through 32, there is a vivid description of what those consequences look like. Paul spreads the table with a list of sins that make us so uncomfortable that most of us would rather skip it altogether. And, you may think that the sins listed in these verses are not consequences, but rather are the sins that people commit. That is true, in a way, but in a very real sense, these sins happen to be nothing less than the consequences that enslave the life of any person who refuses to honor God.

This list of sins ranges from adultery to arrogance; from lesbianism to gossip; from idol worship to lying and deceit. Paul spreads the banquet table and says, in effect, “If you want to get rid of God, this is what you have to look forward to – unrestrained evil, unrepentant wickedness, uninhibited perversion.”

I am led by God to refuse the temptation to hurry through this passage, even though we will hold our breath and hang our heads in shame at times. We will all discover ourselves in this text; none of us will go unmentioned or unnoticed. And, I believe, that if God did not want us to expound on the dark side of our sinful nature, He would not have inspired Paul to spend nearly half of the first chapter of Romans bringing it out into the open with descriptive words.

When God Gives Up On Man

Now, look back to verse 21. We are told that all of mankind knows about the existence of God, through creation and conscience. However, they refuse to place Him on the throne; they refuse to thank Him for His kindness; they suppress the truth about Him. Man has said to God, “Leave us alone in the darkness. We have chosen our sin, instead of the Savior. Leave us alone!”

So, God does! Three times, in verses 24, 26, and 28, are the chilling words,

... *God gave them over* ...

You need to understand that man gave up on God before God gave up on man. Man chose to ignore God, in his rebellion, and God allows man to ruin himself in immorality.

Man does not want a holy, righteous God! So, they take a seat at this awful table of consequences. And, most assuredly, if you do not want God, you will find yourself eating at this banquet. You cannot trifle with the truth of God’s Word and escape unharmed. If you abandon God, God will abandon you! Oh, the tragedy of those words, “. . . God gave them over . . .”.

Now, the Greek word for this phrase, “. . . gave them over . . .”, is the word “paradidomi”. It is actually a word that comes from the Roman system of law. It means, “to be handed over to suffer the payment for one’s crimes”.

It was also used:

- In Mark, chapter 1, verse 14, to refer to John the Baptist being put in jail or “. . . taken into custody . . .”.

- In an illustration given by the Lord Jesus, when He said in Matthew, chapter 5, verse 25,

Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.

- In reference to fallen angels or demons, some of whom were immediately judged, as we are told in II Peter, chapter 2, verse 4,

. . . God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment

So, when Paul writes, in Romans, chapter 1, verse 24, “Therefore God gave them over . . .”, he is describing an act of a righteous judge who takes unrepentant sinners and abandons them to their own undoing.

Passive sense

The verb could be understood passively. This is in the sense of God releasing man to float into the current of sin, which progressively picks up speed until he rushes over the edge of a massive waterfall and crashes on the rocks below.

Active sense

It can also be understood in an active sense. This is in the sense that God does not just release man to float away, He actually fashions the boat, boards man on it, and allows that boat to rush over the waterfall.

God has created moral and physical laws. Some lead to life, while others lead to destruction. God is not only passively involved in allowing man to destroy himself in sin, but actively involved in judging sinful man with the awful consequences and penalties of sin.

So, man wanders around spiritually seeking, with unfulfilled passion. He is in misery, diseased, and in despair. Man has said, “We will choose to ignore our conscience, with its moral whisperings; we will choose to dethrone the Creator, with a god made in our image and more conducive to our sin; we don’t want anything to do with Creator God.”

When God abandons them, He simply gives them their wish!

There is something about this word, “paradidomi,” that has, within it, the nuance of sadness. It describes the feeling of the father whose son turned his back on him and said, “Leave me alone! I want to go as far away from you as I can!”

So, the father gave him his wish, as well as his inheritance. The son then went to a far country and “lived it up” with his money. He bought his friends and his pleasure, until he had spent everything he had.

He soon found himself in a pig pen, covered with filth, abandoned by his cheap friends, and trying to satisfy his empty stomach with pig food. He was seated at his banquet table of consequences. He had destroyed his life and ruined his youth. Apart from the mercy of his father, he would live the rest of his life as a slave. However, the father gave him mercy and robed him with grace.

While you are still living, my friend, you can stop chasing the mirage of the world system and run to the Father and ask for mercy. He will forgive you, clean you, and put the ring of redemption on your finger and the sandals of salvation on your feet. But, if you want to swim in the current of sin, God will abandon you to the waterfall. If you choose the country that is far away from God, then there is a pig pen in your future.

Abandoning the Proper Treatment of People

Paul describes that pig pen in Romans, chapter 1, verses 24 through 32. He begins the description of this banquet table of consequences by saying, in verse 24,

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

Did you notice the progression? When you dishonor God, you dishonor yourself – first, in your heart and then, with your body. The lusting in the heart that is unfettered by a conscience, since, you may remember, the conscience has been choked off and silenced, which may have, at one time, brought a pang of guilt, now no longer even coughs out a warning.

Unfulfilled cravings

The words “lust,” or “epithumia” in the Greek, and “impurity,” or “akatharsia,” are words that, in this context, refer to sins of the flesh.

These unfulfilled cravings might be in the form of drug abuse, or pornography, or sexual immorality. The point Paul is making is that, when you do not long after God, you will long after something else.

You think, "This will satisfy me," but it is saltwater to thirsty lips. You drink and are still thirsty. You drink again and are still thirsty. And, the saltwater begins to destroy you from the inside out.

Society, in our generation, is consumed with sexual content and activity. I read recently, that sixty-eight percent of all television shows have something to do with it; eighty-nine percent of any movie you watch features some form of it; and eight out of ten times you see it, it will be between single people or between married people with someone to whom they are not married. If you are like my wife and I, you now consider even the commercials to be out of bounds!

The trouble with sexual sin, or the lusting of the heart, is that it is never satisfied. When the heart becomes hardened and the thrill is gone, forbidden pleasure needs more and more. It is like a drug addict who needs larger and larger doses to get that original high. Sinners have to go to more and more extremes to get the same sense of pleasure. We are in the process of watching our culture go deeper and deeper into sexual darkness and deviancy.

World Magazine, in March of 2001, reported that the winner of the previous year's Oscar for best picture was the story of a man who rediscovers his vitality by lusting after his daughter's underage friend. The review reported, "Nowhere does the movie present the main character as a repulsive figure, as movies usually depict pedophiles, and the audience [is led to be] definitely on his side."ⁱ

There was also a review of a recent Hollywood attempt to recast an eighteenth century Frenchman, named Marquis de Sade, as a man who was not all that bad. True history, however, reveals that this man was a pornographer who tortured women and molested children. The movie, entitled "Quills," however, cast him as a champion of free speech.ⁱⁱ

Our sexually inundated society is simply reaching for the same thrill, but it is requiring more graphic situations to get the same high. And in the process, sinful man sexually dishonors and abuses one another. They abuse one another through crime and abuse one another through violence.

One author wrote,

As mankind draws further and further away from God, God gives them over to the consequences of their spiritual and moral rebellion against Him. Instead of adhering to God's standards of moral purity, they attempt to remove the consequences of their impurity. They turn to counseling, to medicine, to psychoanalysis, to drugs, to alcohol, to travel, and to a host of other means to escape what cannot be escaped except by the removal of their sin. [And all the while] sin destroys personal relationships, marriages, families, cities and nations. Sin degrades man, debases the image of God in which he is made, and strips him of dignity, peace of mind, and a clear conscience.ⁱⁱⁱ

Solomon wrote, in Ecclesiastes, chapter 9, verse 3,

. . . the hearts of the sons of men, are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives . . .

Do you want to see the insanity of lust? Do you want an illustration of how sexual immorality deceives your intellect and darkens your discerning ability? Look at Samson!

In Judges, chapter 16, the Bible records that lustful, sinful Samson is involved with a woman named Delilah. Let me paraphrase this story.

Delilah is on the payroll of the Philistines, but Samson does not know it yet. She has been promised 11,000 pieces of silver, if she can find out why he is so strong. She comes to him one night and says, "Samson, you say you love me, so we shouldn't keep any secrets should we? How can your strength be taken away?"

Samson says, "Well, if you bind me with seven new ropes that haven't been used yet, my strength will be gone."

He eventually falls asleep and Delilah goes to Lowe's Hardware and buys seven new ropes. Fortunately, Lowe's is open twenty-four hours a day. Then, in the night, she awakens him, "Samson, the Philistines are coming after you."

He tries to get up, but, "What's this?"

There are new ropes tied all around him. He snaps them and takes care of the Philistines.

Now, will Samson put two and two together and come up with the fact that only Delilah knew about his rope secret? No! He thinks, "Not her!"

Later she comes and says, “Samson, tell me the truth, what takes away your strength?”

He says, “Braid my hair into seven braids and I’ll be as weak as water.”

Later that night, after Delilah finishes his hair, she says, “Samson, the Philistines are upon you.”

Samson wakes up and fights off the Philistines. Then, he notices that his hair had been braided. Will he figure it out? No!

Eventually, Samson tells his secret. The Philistines capture him, blind him, by putting his eyes out, and throw him in jail. Thus, he becomes a picture of the blindness of sin in a person’s life and the enslavement of a person given to lust.

Is it any wonder that Solomon would later write, in Proverbs, chapter 6, verse 32a, perhaps thinking of Samson,

The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense.

That is the biblical way of saying, “He is an idiot.”

That is not a very kind word, but it is the truth. There is nothing more idiotic than sin.

And, sexual sin will make a fool out of you. It will destroy, dishonor, and deceive. Sinful pleasure promises something that it cannot ultimately produce. It cannot satisfy. For the moment, or in the case of the wayward son, over a matter of years, it brought pleasure, mirth, and friendship. Eventually, however, it brought pain, guilt, and suffering.

My earliest childhood memory is from the time I was around four years old. I can still picture the bathroom counter and my older brother, who had sneaked out of bed with me, climbing on top of that counter. Everyone else in the house was asleep. He opened the medicine cabinet and pulled down a new bottle of children’s aspirin. This was a kind made at the time, to taste like orange candy. This was also at a time before childproof lids were invented. My brother, who was about five and a half years old, and I divided the bottle of aspirin and ate every last one of them. We thought we had gotten into the candy and fooled everyone. We then went back to bed and fell asleep.

Later, my grandmother, who was spending the night in our home that evening, got up to use that same bathroom. She saw the empty bottle lying on the counter. The next thing I remember, and can still remember to this day, is lying on a cold metal stand at the hospital, with my older brother, the drug

dealer, lying on a stand next to me, having our stomachs pumped. I remember being terrified and in tremendous pain.

It could have been disastrous, however. My life was in mortal danger and I did not even know it. I was in desperate need of intervention. What I thought was delicious, could have led to death.

Maybe you are hearing this today, and you are in the process of being consumed by sexual sin. Perhaps at the moment, it seems good and right and the thing to do. Sin tastes delicious, but it is deadly.

I am here to intervene in your slumber. It may be painful to hear, but I must tell you, sin will defraud you and deceive you and will ultimately, destroy you.

Unrestrained betrayal

According to Paul, sins against the body include not only those against your own body, but those against the bodies of others as well.

The word translated “impurity,” can actually refer to the decay that occurs within the grave. It could include actions of violence against the bodies of others for the sake of personal satisfaction or selfishness. I believe that these things can best be described as the betrayal of one person against another.

Our culture is filled with unrestrained betrayal today. Let me give you several forms of betrayal.

- Abortion is the betrayal of the unborn by the mother and father, as well as society at large that endorses and encourages it.

In America, it is against the law to crush the egg of an unborn eagle, but you can dismember the body of an unborn child.

- Infanticide is the betrayal of babies by the parents.

This step downward was being practiced by the Romans when Paul wrote this letter. In Rome, the father had the right to allow the newborn to live, or to be given as a sacrifice to the gods, or to be placed on the doorstep where pimps would come and take them during the night to raise them for prostitution, or to be simply thrown away!

You might think that infanticide of any form could never happen in our world. I wish it were so.

Even now, chairing a department of ethics at Princeton University, Peter Singer is creating a firestorm of protest, but he is gaining a hearing among the academic elite. He recently wrote an

article entitled, “Killing Babies Isn’t Always Wrong”. He writes,

Perhaps, like the ancient Greeks, we should have a ceremony a month after birth, at which the infant is admitted to the community. Before that time, infants would not be recognized as having the same right to life as older people.

He argues that this is morally acceptable because it is not until weeks or even months after birth that they gain, “self-awareness.”^{iv}

He is not alone! A University of Colorado philosopher, named Michael Tooley, has also said, as far back as 1972, that infants are non-persons who “do not have a right to life.”^v

As selfish, sinful, abusive man wanders further and further away from God’s Word, he loses his standard of human dignity. This dignity and life begins in the womb, according to Isaiah, chapter 44, verse 2, where we are told,

Thus says the Lord who made you and formed you from the womb . . .

David wrote in Psalm, chapter 139, verses 13 and 14,

For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made . . .

Even now, there is a bill pending in Congress called, “Born Alive Infants Protection Act”. This bill simply tries to keep infants who survive abortions from being killed.

Then, there is another form of betrayal.

- Incest is the betrayal of children by adults.

One author wrote an article, that was published in the *Weekly Standard*, in an attempt to show that the age of consent should be drastically lowered, and much of what is called “child abuse” today, should be reconsidered.^{vi}

Another author said that much of what is called abuse between consenting minors and adults should be reconsidered “intergenerational relationships”.^{vii}

The truth is, it is a form of betrayal.

There is another dishonoring action and betrayal of the human body.

- Euthanasia is the betrayal of older people by younger people.

Those who are too old to “contribute” should be put to sleep in the same manner as an animal is put to sleep.

The word, “euthanasia,” is derived from the Greek prefix “eu,” which means, “good or easy,” and the Greek noun “thanatos,” which means, “death”. If you put the two together, you get, “good or easy death.”

That is a lie, however. When you discard the truth from God’s Word that life is sacred and worthy of being saved, then the deformed, the handicapped, the mentally disabled, the old and infirm, the newborn, the unborn, and the undefended child are no longer protected, but are dishonored and betrayed.

Paul wrote, in Romans, chapter 1, verse 24,

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

In other words, in the end, sinful pleasure betrays you, abuses you, and dishonors you, and you dishonor others.

Application

In closing, let me focus on two principles that emerge from this passage.

To abandon God is to be abandoned by grace

1. First, to abandon God is to be abandoned by grace.

In other words, to walk away from God is to walk away from the grace of God. God’s grace gives meaning to your life and purpose to your existence; it gives laughter that is not hollow and does not have to have a drink or a pill to cause it to happen; it provides the foundation for relationships that can give and not always get. Saying, “Goodbye,” to God, is saying, “Goodbye,” to His grace.

To reject the freedom of salvation is to embrace the slavery of sin

2. Secondly, to reject the freedom of salvation is to embrace the slavery of sin.

Paul, in writing to Titus, in chapter 3, verses 3 through 6, contrasted salvation with slavery to sin, when he wrote,

For we also once were . . . disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy . . . But when the kindness of God our

Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior

Let me add one practical warning for the believer. If salvation provided some sort of inoculation against immorality and sinful pleasure, Paul would never have had to write to Timothy, in II Timothy, chapter 2, verse 22, and say,

. . . flee from youthful lusts . . .

Notice that he did not say, “Stand and fight it, Timothy.”

No. He said to run from it.

. . . flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

There is that word again, the word “heart”. In Romans, chapter 1, the unbeliever loses the battle to lust in his heart first. In II Timothy, chapter 2, the believer wins the battle for purity in his heart.

What is the best way for the believer not to live like an unbeliever? David tells us in Psalm, chapter 119, verse 11,

Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.

When was the last time you memorized a verse of scripture? My friend, if you want something quick to overcome sin, I am here to tell you, there is no such thing. Ladies and gentlemen, holiness will never sneak into your life! Moral purity will never be a coincidence.

The battle for purity is fought in the heart of every believer. It is, as Paul called it, a pursuit! And, that pursuit begins in the heart. Before you ever do anything with your body, you give permission in your heart.

Let me give two questions to ask of yourself.

- Is the Word of God in your heart?
- Is the Spirit of God in your walk?

Paul wrote, in Galatians, chapter 5, verse 16,

. . . walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

The word “desire” in this verse is the same word as “lust” in Romans, chapter 1, verse 24.

The only way to overcome the domination of depraved human nature is to be dominated in every step of the way by the Holy Spirit. Walk by means, or in the power of the Spirit and you will not carry out the lusts of the flesh.

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ⁱ World Magazine (March 10, 2001)

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ John MacArthur, Romans Volume 1 (Chicago, IL, Moody Press), p. 100.

^{iv} Chuck Colson, BreakPoint: Commentary #000920, Sept. 20, 2000.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} World Magazine, p. 42.

^{vii} Ibid., p. 42.