

The Sanctity of Life in Biblical Perspective
Pursuing A Gospel-Driven Culture Of Life
Romans 1:18-32

By: Dr. Harry Reeder

January 10, 2010 – Morning Sermon

Romans 1 is our text for this study. This is a really important issue that I want to cover with you this morning. I ask that you focus with me in the short time we have on this issue of a Gospel-driven culture of life. Romans 1:18- 32 says;

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. 28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. 29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

I had just moved to North Charleston and I got for the first day of school. I was in the second grade. Back in my days I walked to school, five miles both ways, up hill, in the snow, bare foot. I did walk to school and that morning I got lost in Park Circle in North Charleston and I remember thinking, “How did I get here?” I didn’t know where I was and then I thought of another question which was “How do I get out of here?”

How did we get where we are today? Remember those times of, “I’m pregnant” and children were a celebration. Remember when life was sanctified. How did we get in a position in which we have a society that is wrapped in a culture of death? That’s where we are. There is much I would like to say about this but I have to be very pointed in this study because I don’t have much time. The text I just read describes a culture in a death spiral that is wrapped in a pagan world and life view. It is fueled and driven by sin and it

ends up as a culture of death. It's not only a culture in a death spiral but it is a culture of death. It is a culture that is described as one that is initiated by paganism. There is no God and creation distinction. The creation and the creature is the god. They de-god God and God, the creation and man with idolatry. When that happens, that culture then begins to go into a death spiral.

This is a culture that contains a phrase I read three times in the text. It the second most frightening phrase that I read in the Bible. The number one most frightening phrase is "Depart from Me." The second phrase is "God gave them up and over." Here is a culture that has just been described for you in which the hand of God's redeeming work of saving men and women by grace has been removed and more than that the hand of God's common grace that restrains evil has been removed. And now man is experiencing depravity from total depravity to absolute depravity. He is experiencing the effects of a pagan world and life view, its idolatry beyond despair into a death spiral and He gives three steps for it.

The first step is when God has been de-god-ed and man has been god-ed through idolatry and the first things He does is give them over in which their legacy will be sexual immorality as they use their bodies in dishonor. Sexual immorality will be rampant and destructive. The second step is God gives them over again and they move from sexual promiscuity now to sexual perversion in the embracing of sodomy and homosexuality as a way of life and denying what is clearly marked out in God's law of nature which is a man and woman in a covenant of marriage with sexuality only embedded in it sacredly. The third and final step is that not only all kinds of evil are embraced from sexual promiscuity and sexual perversion but now the invention of evil, malice, covetousness, anger, cynicism, jealousy, envy, the disregard of parental authority where the society has now moved to social approval of all manners of evil. Does this sound familiar to you?

This is your culture. This is the one we live in. It is a culture in a death spiral and I think we have arrived at step three. It is not only in a death spiral but it a culture of death. This last century that we just left ten years ago had more violent deaths within that one century than all of the centuries of recorded human history before it. There was the holocaust of six million Jews, 25 million Christians in Russia, uncounted numbers of Christian under Mao Si Tung in China, World War I, World War II, countless wars, the Balkans, the travesties in North Africa and the Sudan, and worse than all is the assault upon the unborn in the womb now 60 million and counting in this country. And the legacy of Roe v Wade in 1974 has now led to, I remember sitting in the room when Dr. Schaeffer warned us of this, infanticide where 40 children a day that are inconvenient because of birth defects usually have a sign in the intensive care unit that says "Don't feed." So from infanticide to passive euthanasia, now to active euthanasia where the governor of one of our states is saying to older people that it is your duty to die so find a way to do it and now this is not a political statement but I've read and I'm convinced that this culture of death is now not only legally permissible for abortion, infanticide to euthanasia, it is socially admirable and permissible but now we are finding a way to fund it with tax payers money in the current "health care reforms." We are finding ways to fund it.

How do we get there? How did we get here? How did this happen? I think the proverbial nose in the tent for us was the Roe v Wade decision and abortion. Abortion, infanticide, euthanasia were all predicted and have now come to fruition and its not some

fantasy slippery slope but it's a reality that has come into existence. How did we get to this point? How did we get here? We got here the same way Romans 1 got there. We got here through saying "no" to a theistic way of life, influenced by Christianity in our culture and saying "yes" to paganism and the embracing of sin in the name of the pursuit of happiness and a legal structure that has read into a constitution things that were not there in the name of the pursuit of happiness in order to not only make it legally permissible but fundable and now of course, morally acceptable in the culturally elite in our education, entertainment and political sphere that tell us this is the way of life that true freedom must endure, embrace and pursue. How did we get there?

I want to give you five things that I think got us here. Each of these five things deserve much more treatment than I can give in this study. The first thing that got us here is remember that the hand follows the heart and the heart follows the head. The hand of death and the heart of death came from a head that was directed by a world and life view of death. We have now embraced paganism because unchallenged in our educational system and in our cultural shapers unchallenged is atheistic Darwinian macro evolution. We are not allowed to challenge it in our school systems. We are not allowed to have a public debate about it. Because of an atheistic Darwinian view of life in macro evolution there is now in place a fact that human life is not sacred. The only thing between you and a maggot is a couple of chance mutations. There's nothing different between a human and a tree or a rock except a few mutations that made you different. There's no intrinsic inherent value.

Have you ever heard of the phrase "one man's trash is another man's treasure"? When you have that view of life then one person's pregnancy can be treasure or trash depending on the value we assign to it because there is no intrinsic value in the world and life system we have taught. So that world and life view system that now has led us into paganism has set the stage that human life is expendable. The only thing is what works the best for the majority that's in control whether by money, force or power or whatever. It's whatever that wants. So there is a culturally affirmed world and life view of paganism fueled by Darwinian atheistic macro evolution unchallenged.

By the way, I'm fine for people to teach that but I would like the privilege to challenge it. I would just like the opportunity to go through the process and prove how ridiculous that theory is. To believe in a Creator is not a leap of faith. That is walking in the light. To believe that all of this got here by chance and you can't even explain the "got here's" to this point that is an unbelievable leap of faith. That's leaping in the darkness but that's another subject.

Secondly, the argument to get abortion in place there was the argument of fetal dependency. I'm going to use the language here. Because the fetus in the womb is dependent upon the mother then it is not really a life yet until it can function independently. Therefore we can decide whether we want it to live or not. Why? It is because it is not really a life yet. Why? It is because it is dependent upon the mother in the womb. Friends, that is so illogical. Let's at least take a moment for logic here because after the baby comes out of the womb and two to three days later the baby goes home, is that baby independently living? That baby is still dependent. If that baby happens to have birth defects or irregularities, is that baby independent? No. If that baby gets sick will that baby be able to function independently? No. When that baby gets older and is a senile person will that person be able to live independently? No. So

logically if dependency is the issue of life then why stop at the womb? Guess what? We don't anymore thus infanticide, euthanasia, active euthanasia and that was the beginning position. It was the baby in the womb that was declared not a true person because it is dependent, illogical as that would be.

Thirdly, these children are unwanted and so they will be put at risk of poverty or neglect or abuse. I love it in debates when they bring this one to me. Okay, so an unwanted child is at risk for poverty, neglect or abuse, I'll give you that. So the answer is kill the child. How about we address the sinfulness of neglect, lack of provision and abuse instead of kill the baby? Our answer is that because these children might be unwanted then the answer is kill the child.

The fourth argument that was presented is gender warfare so abortion became a feminist issue. The illogic of that is obvious as well particularly if you go to places like Asia in which female children are not desirable but abortion is a duty. Guess who gets killed? It is the female babies. If I could only have those of the female gender see how many manipulative men are lining their pockets in the abortion industries. They could care less about women's rights. So when you walk into their centers you hear nothing about a child's life. You hear only about a psychologically manipulative movement to destroy the child that puts the money in the pocket of the abortionists and the owners of the place.

To recap we have the culturally affirmed world and life view, secondly the argument of fetal dependency, the third is unwanted children and the fourth is gender warfare. Now the fifth is the pursuit of happiness statement in the constitution which is then interpreted as an unfettered autonomy for the choices I want to make for my happiness in life. So if my child in my womb or the child in your womb that I'm the father of is not wanted then that gets in the way of my happiness therefore the child can be killed thus the phrase 'pro-choice.' Of course, there is one that doesn't get a choice and that's the child. I'm going to use the language again. If the fetus in the womb is wanted we call it a baby. If it's not wanted we call it a piece of tissue.

We wonder why our children a few years later take machine guns to a school campus or why they embrace violence. The reason is they barely escaped violence in the womb and only because somebody decided that their birth as a parent may make them happy. So they get out and hear the same ethic and they look at teachers and classmates that don't make them happy. So I'll do to them what might have been done to me in this culture of death. My choice for my happiness is actually what makes life. Those are the five things that I jotted down that deserve so much more treatment but that's how we got there.

Now how do we get out of here? We get out of there the same way the book of Romans heads. Romans 1 says here's the culture of death. Romans 2 says here's how the religious pagans participate in it. Romans 3 says here's how the religious Jew would participate in it and in Romans 3:23 it says all have sinned and because all have sinned, sin brings death. Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is death. So because of sin and a pagan world and life view there is the result of death, a culture of death and a culture in a death spiral. So what is the answer? The answer is Romans 4, 5, and 6 that ends in verse 23. Romans 6:23 says, "*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" The answer is Christ and the Gospel. That is *the* answer! I'm going to address the issue of constitutional amendments but the answer is not a

constitutional amendment. What makes a culture a culture of death is that it is driven by sin but what makes a culture a culture of life is that it is driven by Good News and the Gospel. The culture of life can only be claimed with the message of Life and the ministry of Life.

So how do we get out of here? It is very simple but it's very profound. It is stated simply but unbelievably challenging. It is by having a Christ-centered, prayer-saturated, Holy Spirit empowered, Gospel ministry. That's the way out of Romans 1 which is found in Romans 6. Sin leads to death, a death spiral and a culture of death. The Gospel leads to life and transformed lives begin to develop a culture of life. So Harry what can we begin to do? Do you have a matching five? I do. I'd like to give you five steps in this study and I'll just enumerate them.

The first step is to have a Christ-centered, prayer-saturated, Holy Spirit empowered Gospel ministry in the public square. Don't be silent on this issue. I'm a pastor that gets brochures all the time that tell me "you can talk about this issue but only in the back room at church, whatever you do don't have a sanctity of life Sunday and don't preach on this or get it out front because you can't grow a church if you do that." Then we are coward in the issue personally and privately. Bring a Gospel heart saturated with prayer and inspired by the Holy Spirit to the public square in either public debate or private conversations. Don't be frightened of public debate. I have done this on many occasions from newspaper editors to television people and it is not difficult and it's not because I'm a smart guy.

It's really interesting because invariably when you're talking about being pro-choice people will say "We want abortions to be rare." Wait a minute, what is an abortion, a removing of a piece of tissue? Why would you want that to be rare? Let's have a debate about tonsillectomies, do you want them to be rare? Do you want appendectomies to be rare? No, then why would you want this to be rare? The reason why is as much as we try to suppress the truth the fact is we know that what is in the womb is not a potato. We know that's not a piece of tissue. We know there's reason in our culture because at one time that baby had the right to inherit. By the way, if you attacked the mother and killed the baby in the womb you were guilty of murder which was our previous legal code because we knew that was a life. Even those who would argue that it's merely a medical procedure and that it's merely tissue know there's something there. This is life and it's not going to mutate into anything else but will develop into the fullness of life and eighty years later, everything that it is, will have already been found in the womb when it was there.

So don't be fearful to go into the public square or the private conversations with a Christ-centered, Gospel driven world and life view. Go with conversation that is bold but humble, that is gracious but with conviction and that focuses upon the real issues which is the issues of our heart.

The second step is we need good, Christian, public leadership that influences public policy and laws. I want to make this clear. I think one of the big mistakes we all think is that if we get a Christian leader this will disappear and if we pass a law this will disappear. The law can only restrain sin or exacerbate the sinfulness. So Roe v Wade exacerbated sinfulness. We have passed other such laws that have been exacerbating and embedding sinfulness. Good laws can restrain sin but it won't change the culture. That's a heart matter. Cultures don't change until people change and people don't change until

their hearts are changed but there is a place and we need public leaders who know how to create the right field of life, who know how to speak for life and who know how to influence policy and legislation that restrains evil and affirms life and that is in our constitution – “life, liberty...” It is life first and then liberty under the rights of life.

The third step is we must do Gospel ministries to women in crisis pregnancies. This must be upon our hearts. They come. They have a child. There’s no money and an abandoned husband or the one who impregnated them has left or the influence of relatives. What do I do? We need to be there to minister to them. This Sunday in 1974 a sermon on the sanctity of life was preached right after Roe v Wade. Dr. Frank Barker preached it. A fellow that had been a high school evangelist and preacher came up to him afterwards and said, “Pastor Frank I have to do something about this. These women need help.” His name was Wales Goble and thus we have Save-A-Life. Last year I think the number is 300,000 babies lived this last year. Just from one of these sermons someone said, these women have to be helped. You may not come up with a Save-A-Life ministry but you can come into one, just like a Heather Payne does so can you.

The fourth step is we must have a ministry to the unwanted children. That may be foster care, adoption or taking care of those children with special needs that would have been unwanted because of the challenges that they face physically. Two Sundays ago I loved standing there during the baptism of the Barker children, those four children who were there because of foster care. Those children were there for two years of prayer and work on adoption. Now we get a chance to raise those four children who could have been lost. So there is that whole ministry of foster care, adoption, and our special needs children. These children are wanted. We will make room for them in Sunday school. We’ll make room for them here and we will assist those parents who face those challenges who said, “I will not do fetal termination reduction.” No, that’s a baby and that baby may not be perfect for the world but God has designed them for me. God has called us to assist them thus special needs for special ones especially designed in a way that you never could be designed to do things you and I would never be able to do in our “perfect design.”

The fifth step is to women and men who are the digging ground for the abortion industry. Let me tell you where they are right now. I make the plea to you. We love you not because we’re special but because God has loved you in the gift of His Son Jesus Christ. We love everyone God loves and there is no unpardonable sin. I know maybe in the counseling you were told “it’s just a piece of tissue and this guilt thing will pass.” No it won’t. Let me tell you about Carol. She was a 92 year old woman. I read about her last year. She was breathing her last breath because of old age, and she was thrashing in the bed. They kept medicating her and the medication wouldn’t work. She reached out to the Chaplain and said, “I can’t die and I can’t stop thrashing.” He said, “Why?” For six decades she had been in denial. She said, “How can I when I did something like I did.” There is no compartmentalization, no denial to get away from the reality of the guilt of sin but oh there is a message of forgiveness. One may think “Well that was a 92 year old woman.”

Let me tell you about Carolyn and she was 40 something when she died. Medication couldn’t give her peace. As she would grab the sheets of the bed, the Chaplain said, “Let’s just pray” and she said, “I can’t pray. How can I pray to God with what I did?” I wished I could have been there at that moment but I’m here to tell you

though that our Savior has died for sinners. He pays for the sins of all of His people. There's only one sin that you can't be forgiven of and that's the one where you say 'no' to the One who died for your sins. He's paid for it all. You can be forgiven.

Some of you may be here in this humanistic therapy saying, "I just have to learn how to forgive myself." I know what people are trying to say with that but you don't forgive yourself. You can't forgive yourself. I know what you're trying to say but you can't do it. You can't give yourself forgiveness unless you can make an atonement. Can you make an atonement? Here's the Good News. The atonement has been made and you can receive forgiveness from a Savior who paid for all of our sins and He is ready to forgive you. Then amazingly He takes, as Heather Payne said, ashes and turns them into roses. So here is a wonderful lady who will now have an opportunity not only to know the sweetness of forgiveness without denying the reality of sin, but understanding a glory of a Savior and now be able to share, minister to others and comfort them with the comfort that she's been comforted with. That could be you if you have been through this. Our Lord has loved you and will loosen you from your sins. We have no greater joy than for you to know that in Him.

So Harry where do we go from here? I know you might think this is not a good closing remark and it's very simplistic but at Briarwood we have a commitment to equip Christians to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ and we need to redouble our efforts in Christ-centered, Gospel driven, disciple making because this acts of the hand come from the heart, and the heart must be informed from Christian thinking. People must be given a Christian world and life view to bring forth a culture of life and a Christian world and life style into the culture. We must redouble our commitment to Christ-centered, Gospel driven disciple making.

Secondly, we must commit ourselves to intercessory prayer in general and on this issue in particular. This isn't that we have to come up with an ingenious method or that there's just some technique we're missing on this thing. We need to pray. This needs to be regular in your intercessory prayer calendar.

Thirdly, just ask yourself, "Lord, where would You have me?" Stop at one of those tables in the lobby. Is your heart for that child – that special needs child, that adoption, that foster child? Is your heart for that woman post abortion or that woman in crisis? Where is God laying this on your heart? Lord, lead me.

His name was Frank and he was an insurance salesman. He was a financial investor/counselor. Frank's wife walked out on him. I preached a sermon on the sanctity of life one Sunday and he came up to me afterwards and said, "Pastor, I need to talk to you." I said, "Frank, let's get together." We had already talked about the fact that his wife had left him for another man. He said, "No, no pastor, I'm working on that but I can't think of anything more important for me to do right now than to serve the Lord in this area. I'm still going to deal with my hurts but I just want to serve the Lord." Frank prayed God would give Him a sign and a heart for this. Then he went out in front of an abortion clinic in Charlotte, North Carolina and held up a sign that said, "Don't abort, we'll help." A lady stopped him one day and said, "Do you mean that?" He said, "Absolutely."

Long story short, Frank took her to the doctor and paid for the doctor. A group of our guys got together, the baby got delivered, one of our lawyers helped, the baby got adopted and I got a chance to baptize the baby. Recently I just saw the child when I went

back to Charlotte this last summer and the child knows the Lord now. Frank said, “I have issues in my life but I’m not going to stop. I’m going to serve.” You’d be amazed at how much that helped Frank and eight months after that happened that abortion clinic closed. The only missing in the whole story I just told you was we didn’t get a chance to evangelize the abortionist because I want them to be saved too. I want them to know life.

You know the story don’t you? You have seen the picture of the woman whose name was Armas who was facing a difficult pregnancy. They wanted to abort because the child had spina bifida. She found a doctor who would help. This doctor does an amazing surgery where he pulls the womb out to the mother and operates within the womb because if you take the child out the child will die. He did the incision and while he was operating on the child, now today living as Samuel Armas, the baby reached up and grabbed his finger with its hand. One newspaper had the courage to print the picture and put under the picture ‘The hand of hope.’ Let’s take our hands, from our hearts, directed by a Christian mind to show the love of Christ – Life not death. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could spend together. Thank You for the privilege to be in Your Word. Thank You for those whom we have heard from and those whom serve You and thank You for this congregation and its heart for Life. Allow us to disciple men and women so that they understand Life in a culture of death and impact this culture of death with Life by being salt and light. Father, help us then to put our hands to work in ministry and put our knees to work in prayer. Please allow this as we lift high Jesus Christ. In His Name I pray, Amen.