

DEVOTIONAL

WHEN IN ROME I
WHEN GOD GIVES YOU WHAT YOU THINK YOU WANT
JUNE 6, 2021

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discussion Starter: Can you give an example from your own life experience of the principle, “Be careful what you wish for, you might just get it”?

Key Text: *“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 righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”*
(Romans 1:26-32)

Be Careful What You Wish For

A married couple, both 60 years old, was celebrating their 35th anniversary. During their party, a fairy appeared to congratulate them and grant them each one wish. The wife wanted to travel around the world on a romantic cruise with her husband. The fairy waved her wand, and poof – the wife had two tickets in her hand for a world cruise. Next, the fairy asked the husband what he wanted. He said, “I wish I had a wife 30 years younger than me.” So, the fairy picked up her wand and poof – the husband was 90!

This humorous story reminds us that we must be careful what we wish for—sometimes we regret receiving what we thought we so badly wanted! Paul tells us in our text that people who reject God and want Him to leave them alone will eventually regret getting what they thought they wanted.

We learned in our previous lessons that God’s response to those who have repressed, rejected, and replaced truth (Rom.1:18-24) is to simply step away: “*God gave them up...*” (v.24). If people want to worship idols of animals, then God will allow them to live like animals in all of their behaviors, especially in the unchecked, full indulgence of the corruption of God’s gift of sex.

In verses 26-27, Paul describes God giving humanity up to unrestrained sexual activity of female (v.26) and male (v.27) homosexuality in which humans trade natural male/female sexual relationships for ones that are contrary to nature as God designed it. God doesn’t need to send fire and brimstone because the effects of living without God bring its own penalties and destruction.

Discuss: How would you help a new Christian to understand that God’s designs and boundaries are best for us?

Wrong Thinking Leads to Wrong Attitudes and Actions

In verse 28, we see that debased thinking leads to debased living: “*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.*” A person with a debased mind cannot make right judgments.

God allows human beings to give full expression to all kinds of sinful desires. In verses 29-31, Paul catalogues 21 different types of sins: “*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.*”

Paul says that these rebels know that they deserve punishment for their sins. Yet, they not only continue to practice these sins without remorse, they approve of these sins—they cheer on others who commit these sins, too: “*Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them*” (v.32).

Discuss: Take a look at the list of sins in verses 29-31. Which do you think are socially acceptable in our society today? In what ways do those “socially acceptable” sins hurt us and others?

How to Be a Christian in a Rebellious World

Our world system is clearly ruled by Satan (John 12:31; 16:11; 1 John 5:19), but we who follow Christ are no longer ruled by sin, nor are we bound by the principles of the world. We are being changed into the image of Christ, causing our interest in the things of the world to diminish as we mature in Christ. We are physically present in the world, but we are not of the world—we are not part of its values (John 17:14-15). We are not to engage in the sinful activities the world promotes, nor are we to retain the corrupt mind that the world creates. Rather, we are to conform ourselves, and our minds, to that of Jesus Christ (Romans 12:1-2). This requires a moment-by-moment intentionality and commitment.

We are to live in such a way that those outside the faith see our good deeds and our manner and know that there is something “different” about us. As Christians, we should exhibit the fruit of the Spirit within us (Galatians 5:22-23). While we can enjoy the things in the world, such as God’s beautiful creation, we are not to immerse ourselves in what the world values, nor are we to chase after worldly indulgences.

Discuss: How would you instruct a new Christian to be *in* the world but not *of* the world?

For Further Study:

In, But Not Of: A Guide to Christian Ambition and the Desire to Influence the World by Hugh Hewitt
Restoring All Things: God’s Audacious Plan to Change the World through Everyday People by John Stonestreet
“How to Stand for Christ without Disengaging from Culture” at www.crosswalk.com