



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Romans 1:18-32

“A Christian Response to AIDS, Part II”

TRANSCRIPT

[Audio Begins] ... our class with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are indeed grateful to Thee for the privilege of turning to the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the light that they throw upon our pathway. And Lord we pray that we may be responsive to the light that Thou has given to us. Deliver us from rebellion and disobedience lack of submission to the things that are clearly expounded in the word of God by the prophets and apostles. Help us also Lord to realize our own weaknesses and failures and sin and enable us by Thy grace to seek Thy face for forgiveness and for enablement to live the kind of life that will be pleasing to Thee. We ask Thy blessing upon each one present. May the questions that we think about tonight be questions that are significant and important in the day in which we live and may we be responsive to the words that Paul writes concerning some of the issues of our day. We ask Thy blessing upon each one present for Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] This is the second and the final of our two part series on a Christian response to AIDS and tonight I would like to center our attention primarily on one of the passages that I referred to last week, Romans 1 verse 18 through verse 32. And so if you

have your New Testament with you and I certainly hope you have, let's read verse 18 through verse 32. I'll read and you follow along in your New Testament. The apostle writes in verse 18 of Romans 1,

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (I'd like for you particularly to notice those expressions there because I'm sure you recognize the apostle has derived them from Genesis chapters 1 and 2 particularly, the language which itself is very similar to that. Verse 24,) Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 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. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil,

disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 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.”

In our last study, last Wednesday night, we mentioned society's responses to AIDS, the leading cause of death in for example, New York City's class of males from the ages of twenty-five through forty-four. And we mentioned that their responses included, it's a political issue concerning medical questions. We are interested in reaching some kind of agreement and in doing some kind of research that will lead to a vaccine that will enable us to overcome this particular problem. It's a political issue also concerning governmental aid it is thought and insurance problems. In fact, I believe it was in today's New York Times, if not it was Monday's that there were two articles entitled, “Who will pay for AIDS and how?” on the editorial pages of that well known newspaper. That's one response, it's a political issue.

And then secondly, some are saying it's simply a disease to be handled like the Black Death, small pox, typhus or polio, past killer diseases. And in fact even in the religious world, a number of people are taking this kind of approach to it, it's simply a disease and we should not do anything unusual with regard to it. That is other than what we would do with any ordinary disease. One Episcopalian minister of Newark, New Jersey has openly espoused a report that calls for blessing such relationships as homosexual relationships. The church's commission on human affairs and health which is studying the same issues is scheduled to make a recommendation to the church's nineteen hundred and eighty-eight general conditions. But Bishop Spong, John Spong is his name, Bishop Spong has been conducting an activist campaign for breaking with the historic sexual morality of the Episcopalian and the Anglican Church and he has drawn some sharp criticism from some of the more traditional members of that particular

denomination. But it's simply a disease and it shouldn't be treated as anything special as if it had anything to do with the judgment of God.

And then finally, I suggested that it has been treated as the judgment of God upon homosexuals. This has been received with a great deal of animosity on the part of both religious and irreligious people. In fact, the Bishop of Edinburgh, an Anglican bishop has suggested that the picture that one gets of God that is if we assume it's the judgment of God upon homosexuality, is the picture of an enraged terrorist who fashions and throws bombs at his enemies no matter who gets injured. That was the bishop's response to the claim that it is the judgment of God upon homosexuals.

Last week we looked at Genesis chapter 1 and chapter 2 and gave at least my considered opinion that according to Scripture, homosexuality at the present in the west and the chief afflicted group of persons seventy percent in the USA who have AIDS had homosexual tendencies, seventy-five percent in continental Europe and eighty eight percent in Britain of those who are afflicted are associated with the homosexual community. But we reached the conclusion at least I reached the conclusion that homosexuality is a deviation from the divine norms as set forth in Scripture. And that interpretation of Genesis chapter 1 and 2 that is most in harmony with those two chapters leads one to the conviction that heterosexual monogamy is God's definition of the term marriage.

Now in tonight, I want to try to answer the second question that I raised last week. And that is, “Is AIDS the judgment of God?” and then to offer a concluding response to the problem. So the question now is, “Is AIDS the judgment of God?” The passage in Romans 1 speaks I think, very plainly to that question and as we'll go on to try to point out we will see that this question is not simply one that concerns AIDS but as a matter of fact touches all sin of which we are all guilty. In fact, when I preached on Romans chapter 1 in that last series on Romans some years ago, I entitled the sermon on Romans 1:18 through about verse 23 as, “All mankind on death's row.” Because I think

that's precisely what one must conclude from the things that Paul says in Romans 1. But the very phrase, the judgment of God provokes a reaction in AIDS discussion. As I mentioned last week, some think of the judgment of God as simply a folk myth. That is we shouldn't expect that anyone who is a sensible person could believe that God would actually judge individuals personally or even in a less than personal way who are guilty of the sin of homosexuality. Sometimes Biblical support is offered for this. For example in Luke chapter 13 and verse 1 through verse 5 we read these words, If you wish to turn there of course you can, but I'll read the verses,

"Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. And he answered and said to them, do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

Now that's a very interesting passage, because it in our Lord's words makes very plain the fact that in the sight of God sin is sin, and therefore worthy of death. And in fact, the idea that there is such a thing as the judgment of God pertains not simply to a sin such as the sin of homosexuality, but as a matter of fact to all classes of sin. So is age AIDS the judgment of God, one might answer by is sin judged by God? And of course if one believes that God does judge sin then part of the answer to that question is immediately apparent.

But let's think about is AIDS a judgment of God, and I'd like to suggest that there are three positions that one might reasonably take. We have time only to consider them briefly but I think perhaps in your own thinking you could add some details that I will not

have the time to give you, or perhaps do not even understand. But first of all, it's possible to take the position that AIDS is a personal curse directed to homosexuals. In other words, the fact that we've had this outbreak of AIDS virus is an evidence that God judges homosexuals personally. It's kind of a gut reaction of a lot of people in our society. When they think about it and they think about what has happened, and because of the historic traditional view that people in our society have in the west where we have had a foundation of reliance upon the traditions of the word of God. It's not surprising that they would have that gut reaction "that's wrong, and therefore God is judging them personally." They probably at least most of them have not thought it out real carefully, that's just the way they respond to it. I think, probably some of you have had the same kind of feeling at least I have, I'm willing to admit I have, that when I read about this, of course I've been concerned about this for many many years, because I've been expounding passages like Romans, but that was a kind of gut reaction that I had when the AIDS plague became general knowledge and publicity about it became common. It's very difficult for readers of the Bible to not react it seems to be with that kind of gut reaction.

Judgment means punishment, but we should remember that this applies to other kinds of sins as well. It applies to drug users, it applies to promiscuous heterosexuals, furthermore, when we think about AIDS as being a personal curse, there are people who are from the human standpoint, innocent who nevertheless suffer. Take babies for example, born of mothers who have contracted the disease, or take people who've gone to the hospital with some type of disease that required a transfusion and then because of the needle and the transfusion of blood, contracting AIDS for which they are not responsible. In other words, there are people who are suffering from AIDS who are not according to our common views of responsibility are not responsible. And so the idea that AIDS is a personal curse upon the individual who has it is hardly true to what we know at the present moment of AIDS. The wives of unfaithful husbands who in their unfaithfulness have contracted AIDS and then have given it to their wives, would be say

that because they have AIDS they are under the personal judgment of God? Well, hardly. At least I don't think we would.

Furthermore, lesbians are at less risk than male homosexuals. Is God partial to females? Well, some of us may have an idea that he's a bit partial to females, but when we think theologically, we couldn't really hold a position like that. So, when we say AIDS is a personal curse, there are too many things that one might say in opposition to that to make that convincing. That's one position, AIDS is a personal curse directed towards homosexuals.

Secondly, we might take the view that AIDS has nothing to do with judgment. Now this is the gut reaction of others. It's the gut reaction of those who don't like God as judge. And this is really the gut reaction so far as I can tell from my reading, of the vast majority of the gay community. Their gut reaction is that there is no such God like that and if there were, he would not act in that way.

Now, some are feeling a bit different today. There was a homosexual minister, a Christian, professing Christian minister, in fact in the magazine which is a national magazine where this was referred to, that was put in quotes as if to suggest there was some question about it. But he said something like this, that in the gay community, there has been reaction to the idea that this is a judgment of God upon the homosexuals. But he said, nevertheless, at the gut level, that was his expression, at the gut level, there is a whole lot of guilt felt by many.

Now if we analyze this for a moment, AIDS has nothing to do with judgment, are we saying this is simply a disease as the dean Peter House, an Anglican theologian has suggested? A man who has some influence in England. Did not all disease however originate with the fall? As a matter of fact, every kind of disease has its relationship to what happened in the Garden of Eden, because all disease ultimately will take the lives of men. And we know from the fact that all of our ancestors have already passed on from this particular planet into the life after death; we know that we are all afflicted by what

happened in the Garden of Eden. And so when we think about something as being simply a disease, there is no such thing that is simply a disease, because disease itself is the result of the fall in the Garden of Eden. Now I'm not saying of course that I could prove that the fact that you catch a cold tomorrow, that that's directly related to the fall. But ultimately, it is, at least in my opinion. But what would we say about child abuse and violence in the light of this? Can we say that these things too are things which have no relationship to the fact of the judgment of God?

A third position that one might take is that AIDS is a part of God's judgment on society. Not the judgment of God upon society, for that encompasses all of society and all of the sinners of society which comprises all of us. We could say however that AIDS is a part of God's judgment on society. Our society, I think many of us who are evangelical Christians, wouldn't have any difficulty in believing this, that our society, that is our society in the western world with which we are most familiar, our society encourages behavior that leads to the spread of AIDS. In other words, sexual promiscuity, we have been exposed to a kind of propaganda campaign since the sixties, and of course this has been going on for a very long time, but then an outbreak that has fostered the kind of situation that has existed in the sixties and seventies and out of which has come the day of AIDS at the present time. And so, sexual promiscuity has been thought to be liberation, often associated with liberation, freedom that is to have any kind of sexual relationship that you would like to have. So these are some of the position, and I'll try to argue for this third position, that AIDS is a part of God's judgment on society, he is a judge, he does judge society, this is part of his judgment, but it's not all of his judgment, and his judgment encompasses all sin and all sinners as well.

Now Romans chapter 1 is, I think, the chapter that most specifically speaks to the point, so if you'll turn again to Romans chapter 1, I want to say a few words about this. Now first of all, one of the fine preachers in Switzerland some years ago, in the twentieth century, but a few years from this, began a series of sermons on the Epistle to the Romans

and came to this particular part of this Epistle to the Romans, and he said something like this, that Romans chapter 1 is a chapter that “tells us everything that we ought to know about ourselves, and therefore, since it tells us the whole truth about ourselves,” he went on to say, “Some of you in this audience might like at this point,” (incidentally, he was preaching in a Reformed Church, a very large Reformed Church, in the city of Berne in Switzerland.) He said, “Some of you at this point in the light of that might like to steal quietly away, out of the church at this moment, and if you do, go ahead and do that.” Because as he went on to point out, he was going to say what Paul had said about our society. It’s one of the striking things; I think of our society, that we avoid that three letter word, sin. Every effort is made in the popular press to avoid the use of the term sin.

When George Wallace was shot, Eric Sevareid came on channel four and sought to explain in his own rather simple philosophical way why we have violence in our society. First of all, he traced it to the frontier spirit. He said, “Perhaps it was the frontier spirit that led the individual to shoot Wallace.” Then it was the violence that was prominent in the society. And then surprisingly, Mr. Sevareid said the media may have had some responsibility for it as well. But he could never say it was because we are a sinful society. When John F. Kennedy was assassinated in the city of Dallas, it was very interesting to read the papers about that. So far as I remember, not once was Oswald accused of sin. Every other kind of word that might have been used to explain Oswald’s actions was used, but the word sin was never used. It’s almost as if there was a studied attempt to avoid, but I think it’s probably just a natural reaction of the human being. It’s a convicting thing to even use the term, because we know we belong there. It’s like a man who is caught in Niagara River and he’s on the way to the falls, and he’s trying to put the blame for it on someone else, when first of all, he managed to get too near the side, he tripped and slid into the waters and lost control and was on his way down. And I can imagine him trying to think of things that might excuse it. Like the level of the river bottom or the two sides were places to which he could not swim or he could not swim

upstream or he couldn't make it to the side. In other words, every kind of excuse that a person might give for being in that calamity except I was foolish to go near the side of the river and to walk over by a place that was wet and damp and slip in. It's that that's characteristic of our human nature it seems to me. Well now, looking at Romans 1:18 and following, I'll just mention the flow of Paul's thought, we don't have time to do that obviously, we would be here for hours if we did that, but in verse 18, the apostle mentions the divine revelation of wrath,

“The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, (And then he explains, giving the reason for this,) because (verse 19 and 20) because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”

In other words, the reasons are plain. God has given them a full revelation of what Paul calls here in verse 20, “his eternal power and divine nature,” and they are therefore without excuse. And in verse 21 through 23, he talks in more detail about the human response. He says,

“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”

In other words, they became just like the animals really. So we have here then a divine revelation of wrath, the reason for it suggested in 19 and 20, and the human response of disobedience and rebellion in verse 21 through 23, and finally, in the remainder of the chapter, retributive judgment on the part of God and I want you to notice just this, in verse 24, verse 26 and verse 28 the apostle uses an expression to outline and detail this divine retribution. It's a simple word, it's actually one word in the original text, but it's translated here “gave over.” Notice the 24th verse, “Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity.” Verse 26, “For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions.” And then in verse 28, “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,” So, three times the apostle has stated, “God gave them over.” There is wrath, there is sin and there is retribution.

Now I want to make just a couple of comments on some points, I think that bear on what I want to say about those words. You'll notice in the 18th verse the apostle says, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” Now, the reason I'm mentioning this is because people in our society often say that this is right or this is wrong, that's right, that's wrong, and so on. In other words, what is moral is supposedly an important thing in our society. No one ever discusses in our society why we believe some things are moral and some things are immoral. The question of the norm by which we determine morality and immorality is never discussed in our society. Because ultimately that will lead us to the question is there a God? And if there is a God, then what he says in his word is moral and what he says is immoral in his word is immoral. But we never get that far in our society. We're not very deep thinkers in the United States these days. You can see from the apostle's writing here however that God has priority to morality. Notice the 18th verse again, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” It's not unrighteousness of men and ungodliness, but the order is an important thing to note. It's

ungodliness and therefore, immorality. In other words, to put it in a simple statement, perversion in life flows from perversion in faith. Perversion in life issues from perversion in faith. Perversion in life flows from perversion toward God.

In other words, if we don't believe in God, well, it was Dostoevsky; I think I made reference to this, who said, “If God doesn't exist, everything's possible.” So fundamentally, Paul begins by letting us know right in the beginning that it's ungodliness first, then unrighteousness. It's ungodliness that is the important thing. And perversion in life comes from perversion in faith. Now it's very clear from what Paul says here, that God takes very seriously the fact that he is the creator and the judge of this universe. In fact, I don't know of anyone, and never will know of anyone who takes his quote job unquote more seriously than the Lord God himself. He does. And he carries out strictly everything that he has set forth in his word.

Now what about this statement, “God gave them over?” Because that undoubtedly has something to do with “Is AIDS the judgment of God?” “God gave them over,” what does it mean when it says, “God gave them over.” Well, if you look at this passage, you will see that it's a story of man's religious history. And man's religious history is one not of evolution, but of devolution. That is, man began with the knowledge of God, and man disintegrated, devolved, into a rebel in the kingdom of God upon this earth. So that what we have here is men who start with the knowledge of the existence and the power of God and who move to the worship of created things. That's devolution, that's not evolution, that's devolution. Regardless of the other issue, what we have here is devolution and a like motif.

As the Germans would call the real point of the section is found in this three-fold, “God gave them over.” What does it mean, “God gave them over”? Well there are three senses that one might give to this expression. It has been given in the history of the interpretation of the Epistle to the Romans. First of all, we might take that word in a permissive sense. That is, God permitted them to do what they were intent on doing, and

so he just permitted them. Now if you'll look at this verb, and it's translated accurately in our English versions, this is not a passive verb, this is an active verb. This is an active action on the part of God. God gave them over. It expresses a positive activity on God's part. So, most have felt that that explanation is not sufficient to explain this particular statement, “God gave them over.”

So there has been a second explanation offered. What scholars and New Testament exegetes call the privative sense. That is God withdrew his restraining hand. He let them go by just as one might for example have a boat in a raging river tied to a wharf and how you might go over and untie the boat. So you might do it specifically, but it would be the relaxing of the restraint. And so it's been understood in that privative sense. And there are some passages in the New Testament that suggest that there's some exegetical reason for an individual trying out that interpretation. Without going again into all of the details of the answer to that particular interpretation, there are some serious objections to it. It's obvious again that “God gave them over” is a very strong expression, and the idea of withdrawing the restraining hand does not seem to be there. It's read into the passage by some, so most of the commentators who have thought about this in some detail have reached the conclusion that that's probably not the meaning of the apostle.

And so we're left with the interpretation that the term, “God gave them over” has a judicial sense that is a penal, judicial sense. God positively gave men over to the lusts of their hearts. If you'll turn over to Romans chapter 4 and verse 25, for example, we have the word again, “He (Christ) who was delivered up because of our transgression, and was raised because of our justification.” Now that delivered up, is the verb that is found in Romans chapter 1: 24, 26 and 28, and we surely would not say that the Lord Jesus was permitted to go to the cross. But he was actually delivered over to the cross in order to be the sacrifice for our sins. So probably what Paul means here is that by an act of judicial retribution, God has given men over to the things that are expressed here.

Now notice some of the things in verse 24, God gave them over to the lusts of their hearts. In the lusts of their hearts to impurity that their bodies might be dishonored among them. Now the giving over is a kind of giving over to the things that they wanted to do. So, judicially, and retributively, he gives them over positively to the things that they wish to do.

Verse 26, “For this reason, God gave them over to degrading passions.” And here are the sexual aspects of the retribution of God are emphasized,

“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 lusts towards one another, men with men committing indecent acts shameless kinds of acts, and receiving in their own persons, the due penalty of their error.”

Now we talked about that last week, and pointed out how that the apostle has plainly said that homosexuality is sin in this particular passage. Now in chapter 6 verse 17, chapter 8 verse 32, again that term is used and again it is used of a positive handing over. In Romans chapter 8 verse 32, it's particularly significant, because again it refers to Christ and there we read the words, “He who did not spare his own son, but delivered him up for us all.” There it is, handed him over, for us all. “How shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” And so here we have then God actually acting in retributive judgment. So what we can say from this passage is simply this, that moral depravity is the result of divine judgment. Moral depravity is the result of divine judgment.

Now that raises a very interesting question, because you know people like to say things like this, “If we continue as a society in the way in which we're going now, we're going to be judged by God.” Now there's a sense in which that's true, that is the final judgment, the judgment of the great white throne. Or even if Christians are involved in

certain sins, they face the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. There will be a final accounting and we all will say the judge of all the earth has done that which is right, everyone of us even though we may not personally, like some of the things that appear at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, as we are examined and made to see ourselves and God sees us exactly as we really are learning things perhaps about ourselves that we haven't even known. So, judgment is something that one faces in the future. We face it our society faces it as well. But remember, we cannot distinguish between society and individuals; society is made up of individuals. So when we talk about judgment upon society, we're talking about judgment upon the individuals of society.

Now I say this, this question is if we don't watch out, if we don't change our ways, we're going to be judged by God. People when they say that really are not thinking about the final judgment when everything becomes just before God and judgment comes to its conclusion. They're thinking about some judgment on our society now, some terrible thing that might happen to us. Americans think about the Russians may come or whatever it may be that you feel would be a judgment upon our society.

Now in the light of this, I'd like to make a few comments that were suggested to me some years ago by reading some things that a famous Harvard sociologist, Pitirim Sorokin said. He wrote a book called *The crisis of our age*. He warned that increases in crime, suicides, mental breakdowns revolutions and war have been symptoms of civilizations in the midst of death pangs. In another article on homosexuality, in Time magazine many years ago, Mr. Sorokin wrote, “At their fullest flowering, the Persian, Greek, Roman Moslem civilizations permitted a measure of homosexuality. As they decayed, it became more prevalent.” Later, Sorokin wrote and probably some of you at least know of this book or perhaps have read it, *The American Sex Revolution*. And he pointed out that sex anarchy leads to mental breakdowns rather than the other way around. In other words, sex anarchy leads to mental breakdowns, not mental breakdowns to sex anarchy. The Freudian psychologists took the other view. Further, he

pointed out that increasing sexual license leads to decreasing creativity and productivity in the intellectual, artistic and economic spheres of life.

What then are the sources of the present problems? As Howard indicates, the man who cited this particular statement from Sorokin, Spengler, had a biological answer, “civilizations grow old and die like any other living thing.” Arnold Toynbee who analyzed civilizations and wrote gigantic volumes which you are familiar with no doubt. He had a religious answer he said, “Civilizations fail to respond to the higher challenges of the spirit and therefore they fossilize.” Albert Schweitzer tried to find an ethical answer. Paul had still a different answer. When Paul writes on this subject, he expresses it very impressively and most succinctly, he says, when man rebelled and sinned, God gave them up to uncleanness and the lusts of their hearts. In other words, sexual rebellion, sexual license and anarchy is, not will be, is the righteous judgment of God.

The civilization of the western world including the particular civilization of the United States of America is not a civilization in danger of judgment. Our civilization is a society under judgment. That's what Paul is saying. He's saying that all human society is under judgment. It's not even proper for us to say we're going to be judged as if judgment lies in the future, judgment is here with us now, here with us ever since the fall in the Garden of Eden. We have been a society under divine judgment whether in the east or the west or in the third world, and surely there is every reason in the world for thinking that. Civilization has already contracted a malignant and fatal cancer, AIDS may be one of the expressions of it, sensational outbreaks of it, but we are a society under judgment, all of us are. It's unbelief of the message of God in Christ and our society is hurrying on with increasing speed to a final climactic destruction at the time of the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So when we talk about whether AIDS is the judgment of God, let's be sure to broaden out to include all of our human sin. It's certainly a pathetic thing to see an individual afflicted with the disease of AIDS, so far as we know, and so far as our

information at hand is and so far as the means is concerned, is a fatal disease. But let's not forget that there are other things that bring us also under the judgment of God.

Now, it's natural to ask a question, “Is Paul talking about what happened in the Garden of Eden?” Well, I suggest that he is, the tenses of the verb suggest that. And furthermore, that language that I pointed you to when he talks about things like corruptible man of birds, four footed animals, and crawling creatures, it's obvious, he's thinking about Genesis chapter 2 and 1. And then in chapter 5 when he says, “As by one man, sin entered into the world and death by sin,” he traces everything that he describes here in Romans 1 back to the fall in the Garden of Eden, and we all stand under the judgment of God. Those who are homosexual and those who are not, we all stand there.

And as a matter of fact, as you know, if you read on in this chapter, we tend in a time like this when AIDS, so sensationally is before our eyes, that special sin of a certain segment of our society, that we don't read on about what Paul has said after this natural to unnatural use of the sexes and here we read in verse 29, “Filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, malice, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, they are gossips.” Why surely Paul made a mistake there. Gossip linked with homosexuality? “Slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents.” Who has not had a child disobedient to its parents? And there it is, right in company with some outstanding sins. Now there are differences in degree of sin, we know that from the New Testament. But the important thing is that all sin is sin. All sin brings one under the judgment of God.

So, in the light of Romans 1 then, sexual promiscuity of all kinds is under the judgment of God. That includes adultery, that includes fornication, that includes sleeping around as we say, and that includes wants as well as the habit. All sexual sins come under the judgment of God as well as other kinds of sin. Greed, gossip, greed is mentioned there too, in our society, so filled with greed, and we can only conclude,

swinging's out. Heterosexual monogamy is in. And at least in that respect, we can come into harmony with the word of God.

William G. T. Shedd in somewhere, I cannot locate it right now, it's in my notes somewhere, I read it today, but I don't think I have it with me. He comments upon I believe as I remember, a man who was walking through a hospital room and as he looked at all of the people there in this room who were there for various reasons that suggested a lifestyle out of harmony with God. He said, “God almighty writes with a very legible hand.” That's true, God almighty writes with a very legible hand, and it's all said out there.

Now we have nine minutes, I want to say just a few words about a Christian response to this present epidemic. Of course you already anticipate what I might say. Now these are just tentative comments, I admit that I haven't thought deeply about this other than collecting material and wondering about it. And first, I'd like to say a word about our response as citizens in the United States of America. The thing that stands out to me as a Christian man, a preacher of the gospel, is that I must be characterized by compassion for these victims. Some of them are innocent remember, in fact some who have AIDS have far more innocency about them than some of us who don't have AIDS. Let's remember that. And so compassion is a very appropriate response for us who are Christians, concern for their care, for their hospitalization, insurance, research to find a cure if we can of this particular disease, although of course, we wonder if a cure is found will people then respond, “Well I'm free now, I can go out and resume the kind of lifestyle that brought me into this condition.” Cooperation and education, I think that's very important, because there are many people who do not understand AIDS, it seems very simple to us and the things that we should do to avoid any kind of contact that might be infectious. It's very easy for most of us in this room to understand, but there are many who do not, cooperation and education and research for relief and cure.

And then I think also, to be perfectly honest, we should be free to criticize society's legal response. In other words, if our government or our governments do not respond in a way that is appropriate to the peril that faces us, then we should speak out. Even though we may be criticized, we should speak out. When it comes to alcoholism and drunk driving we feel free to speak out about that, we should feel free to speak out about this. Just as we speak out about drugs and crime, we should speak out about this. Well, these are the things that I think characterize our proper response as citizens, perhaps there are other things that come to your mind.

Our response as Christians however, is a bit different. We of course are called upon by God to proclaim the truth of human sin and God's judgment upon society and its members. And therefore, we are to preach the gospel of Christ to people who have AIDS just as we do to people who have the more popular types of sin, gossip, greed, the other things that characterize the human sinful animal. So we are to proclaim the truth of salvation through Christ and we are to the fact and truth of the judgment of God. Even though it's regarded as a folk-myth, we nevertheless, preach and preach in order to win men to Christ. We also proclaim forgiveness. Forgiveness for homosexuals, lesbians, gossips, slanderers, malicious people, greedy people, all the rest of the ways in which sin breaks out. Paul almost exhausts the Greek language for sin in word after word. All of my Greek students at the seminary when they had to read Romans 1:18 through 32, they always complained about having to remember all of those words that the apostle used there to describe various aspects of human sin. Well, sin does break out in amazing ways. The fruit of the spirit is that beautiful nine-fold collection of virtues Paul describes in Galatians chapter 5.

But we are to proclaim the forgiveness of God. And even in connection with AIDS, there is just reason to believe that individuals can be delivered from homosexuality. We're often told, and particularly by those afflicted with it that there is no cure. That is not true, that is a learned endeavor or activity as many, both psychologists and other

medical men are pointing out today. Masters and Johnson in nineteen seventy-nine in talking about thins said that of those who wish to be delivered from homosexuality, over half of them were successfully recovered. Now if over half are successfully recovered apart from a Christian relationship, how much more might be done for them with a Christian approach.

And then finally, I think that it's very important for us as Christians to publish and spread the Biblical and sexual norms that are set forth in the word of God. There is nothing more beautiful as marriage as it is set forth in the word of God. And that's a responsibility that we have, to set forth precisely what God says about marriage.

I close with this particular point. It's helpful for us to remember and I've tried to labor the point, but this quotation will I think say the point quite well, the greatest sin of all is of course not homosexuality, it's not adultery, it's not selfishness, it's not any kind of out breaking kind of sin that we read about in our literature and in many places in the Bible. The greatest sin of all is the sin of unbelief.” That's the foundational sin. Listen to Bishop Ryle's comments and we'll close with this.

“No sin is so great, so damning and so ruinous to the soul as unbelief, in one sense, it's the only unpardonable sin. All other sins may be forgiven, however many and great and a man may stand complete before God. (Incidentally, unbelief may be forgiven as well.) But if a man will not believe on Christ, there is no hope for him and if he persists in his unbelief, he cannot be saved, nothing is so provoking and offensive to God as to refuse the glorious salvation he has provided at so mighty a cost by the death of his only begotten Son. Nothing is so suicidal on the part of man as to turn away from the only remedy that can heal his soul. Other sins may be scarlet filthy and abominable, but not to believe on Christ is to bar the door in our own way and cut off ourselves entirely from Heaven.”

I hope that Christians and at least the Christians in Believers Chapel and you friends who are here tonight will remember that AIDS is part of the judgment of God. In fact, it's one of the things that suggests that the degree of the judgment of God under which we are at the present time may be increasing. But let us remember that it's sin, all these various types of sin and preeminently that sin of unbelief that makes us sinners too and in need of forgiveness. And may God give us the kind of response that will glorify our Lord and also be the means for the proclamation of the gospel of Christ in our day. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the things that the word of God has set forth. Help us to remember the compassion, the care, the concern and also the truth that characterized our Lord's dealings with sinners. Sinners of different degrees, but nevertheless all sinners and help us Lord to remember that's what we are. And when we think of so many pathetic cases in our society of rebellion against the word of God sometimes because individuals have had little exposure to the types of things to which we've been exposed, we feel ourselves very convicted, failing to proclaim Thy word to men and women that by Thy grace we may be used to bring some to the knowledge of him whom to know is life eternal ...

[AUDIO ENDS ABRUPTLY]