

Human Behavior 101

Romans 1:28-32

Introduction

Robert Sapolsky is considered to be one of the top behavioral scientists in American academia today - - - a neuroscientist – who teaches at Stanford

One of his more popular books– titled ‘Behave’ [a NY Times Bestseller] seeks to grapple with human behavior in its many facets - - - in his book he argues that undesirable human behavior [which we call sin] - - - he says is not due to some principle of sin or evil in the individual

Our behavior is determined by: neurobiology / hormones / childhood / life experiences

Sapolsky – is the child of Russian Jews who immigrated to America - - - he was raised in Orthodox Judaism - going to synagogue until he was 13 - - - but rejected belief in God as a teenager

In a podcast interview – Sapolsky said that after learning in synagogue about how God “hardened pharaoh’s heart,” he woke up one night at 2 am as a teenager and said, “oh – I get it! There is no god and there’s no free will. The universe is this big, empty, indifferent place. And that’s kinda where I’ve been at ever since.’

So – he recognizes that he brings to the table two foundational beliefs to his approach to human behavior

- 1) There is no god [no moral lawgiver to whom all people are accountable to beyond this life]
- 2) He rejects the concept of free-will – choosing to believe instead that we live in a deterministic / fate driven world – in which humans are not ultimately responsible for their behavior

The murderer isn’t really responsible for his choices to murder - - - that’s just the cards that he has been dealt – thru biology and life experience / etc. - - - he’s just dancing to his DNA

Don’t blame me for stealing from you - - - it’s the fault of my brain – or the fault of my upbringing / etc.

Sapolsky: ‘There must be a way of protecting society from dangerous people without telling the dangerous people they have rotten souls. It’s a quarantine model and it’s straight out of public health.’

If someone is incorrigibly hostile and dangerous to society - - - we can send them away to the island of misfit toys [prison] - - - not because they are evil - - - but because they are not put together right

Robert Sapolsky: 'what must be abolished are the views that punishment can be deserved and that punishment can be virtuous.'

Sapolsky: 'The hope is that when it comes to dealing with humans whose behaviors are among our worst and most damaging, words like, "evil" and "soul" will be as irrelevant as when considering a car with faulty brakes, that they will be as rarely spoken in a courtroom as in an auto repair shop.'

Sapolsky reminds us that one of the most hated doctrines in the Bible is the doctrine of human sin – and that the sinner merits the wrath of God

You can say a human is broken - - - and in need of some treatment / or quarantine -- - but don't tell me he is a sinner who deserves judgment

Augustine: 'The beginning of knowledge is to know oneself to be a sinner.'

That is human behavior 101

If we miss this truth about who we are - - - we will not understand our world or human behavior

This next passage of Romans - - - Paul gives us a whole catalog of sins / wicked behaviors: / greed / evil / envy / murder / strife / deceit / malice / inventors of evil . . .

i.e. the teaching of the Bible is that we are moral creatures who are capable of doing good or evil actions

But - - - in the final tally - - - All are sinners and fall short of the glory of Glory of God

Paul is showing us why the gospel is necessary

Sinners have hope - - - if they look to Calvary

Jesus came into this world – to save sinners

Misfit toys / neuro-biological robots have no hope

But wretched sinners - - - can be saved

The lost can be found

The blind can be made to see

How did John Newton go from being a drunken / foul sailor on a slave trading ship - - - raping the women slaves on board - - - to becoming the sweet hymn writer and preacher at Olney?

He cast himself on the mercy of God – and believed in Jesus Christ – received forgiveness of sin / and a new heart

Amazing grace - how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found
Was blind but now I see

I. The Depraved Mind - v. 28

We are in the midst of a section in which Paul has been telling us why things are the way they are in the world

Men and women reject God – God turns them over to their sin

Timothy Keller: 'God has, in wrath, given us what we have chosen: life without Him, worshipping things which cannot satisfy.'

Ultimately unleashing hell on earth

One question that comes up in Christian apologetics:

'If there is a God – why is the world such a mess?'

Answer: 'man has turned away from God - - - and God has turned him over to his choice of sin and depravity.'

In a sense – sinful man makes his bed - - - then he has to lie in it – [until he chooses to repent]

We all see the same mess - - - the only question is: 'Will we listen to what God says our problem is - - - or come up with alternate theories and ideas about human behavior?'

Now – Paul says that God has given men over to a depraved mind – to do those things which are not proper

This is a degraded world – a world in which man is given over to sin! - - - given over to a depraved mind

But man is still a responsible creature

He has a conscience that bears witness to the idea of right and wrong behavior

The heavens declare the glory of God / bear witness to the Creator

But the sinner chooses to go against such things

If we will not have God who is the truth - - - then what we get instead is that which is false and corrupt and vile

Charles Hodge: 'If men will not believe the rational and true, they will believe the absurd and false.'

Ours is a world under judgment even today

God has judicially abandoned the sinner over to his sin

Charles Hodge: 'God does not impel or entice to evil. He ceases to restrain. He says of the sinner, "Let him alone."

And the sinner in the corruption of his nature - - - chooses his sin

That is human behavior according to the Bible

When I was a kid - - - I remember hearing the name Charlie Starkweather – he was before my time – but still a lingering infamy in the Nebraska psyche

Charlie [who was 19] had a relationship with a 14 year old girl - - - Carol Ann Fugate - - - this relationship met with parental disapproval - - - he and Carol Ann went off on a violent murderous spree - - - killing eleven people in Nebraska and Wyoming [1957-58]- - - he was later put to death in the electric chair [1959]

Carol Ann claimed to be his hostage – later paroled in 1976

Charlie in a letter from prison to his parents, wrote: "but dad I'm not real sorry for what I did cause for the first time me and Caril had fun."

There is the sinner's heart – no acknowledgment of guilt or sin – no saying: 'God be merciful to me the sinner.'

Sapolsky and Joe Biden would've spared him the death penalty - - - even though he expressed no remorse for his actions

Paul says it all begins with man's stance towards God

When man decides that he does not want to acknowledge God / live life God's way - - - all kinds of moral chaos follows

We can either fall on our face and repent before God - - - or we can march blindly forward and say - - - 'I know what I'm doing' – I'm not sorry – 'I'm not evil'

Blame the brain if you don't like what I'm doing

Someone asked me this week - - - what does the church say to the homosexual?

What should the homosexual do?

What should the murderer do?

What should the person who has an abortion do?

What should the sinner do? [the liar / fornicator / drunkard]

We should fall on our faces before God - - - and say – God be merciful to me the sinner - - - and look to Calvary for our redemption – the shed blood of Jesus

II Corinthians 5:17 - 'Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come.'

The gospel is the key to behavioral transformation - - - it makes us into new creatures in Christ

MLJ: 'A Christian is not just a man who has decided to be a little bit more moral than he was, or who has decided to join a church, or who has decided this or that, whatever it may be. What makes a man a Christian is that he has been born again, he has been given a new nature, he is a new creation, he is altogether different from what he was before.'

We sing the song

O For a Thousand Tongues:
His blood can make the foulest clean
His blood availed for me

That's our creed! That's our doctrine

To God be the Glory:
The vilest offender who truly believes
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives

Our problem is not just that we do bad things - - - but that we are alienated from God / guilty before Him – needing to be reconciled to the Father

Here's the rub - - - if we embrace the deterministic / fate model of human behavior - - - or the neurological model / or the victim of circumstance model - - - or the dancing to my DNA model - - - then nothing much can be done

In such a scenario – there is no place for a Savior / for a gospel

There are many ways to be an unbeliever - - - but one common core of all unbelief - - - is a refusal to acknowledge that one is a sinner – that one has been a rebel against God - - - rightly deserves the wrath of God

But when we see our sin - - - there's hope - - - if we look to God for grace

II. A Catalog of Sins - vv. 29-31

Paul says - 'this is man apart from Christ.'

This is human behavior

MLJ: 'As we read his words we are not simply looking at pagan society nearly two thousand years ago; we are also looking at London today, Paris, New York, any one of them; here is modern life, here is the modern world.'

We see unrighteousness / wickedness / greed / evil / deceit / murder / malice

What do we mean when we say that man is a sinner?

We live in a moral universe / with a moral lawgiver

Wayne Grudem: 'Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.'

The concept of sin takes into account that we live in a moral universe - - - and God is a righteous judge - - - who cares how people act in this world

Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14 - 'The conclusion when all has been heard is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.'

Paul points to malice / unloving / unmerciful as sinful traits

Roman society - - - Infanticide was common - - - if a father chose not to keep a baby - - - they would just be abandoned by the road side - - - Christians were known to later come along and adopt them.

Paul has already referred to people being given over to the lusts of their hearts

Will Durant says of 1st century Rome – 'every well to do woman had at least one divorce. The Roman like the Greek, readily condoned the resorts of men to prostitutes . . . the elder Seneca asserted widespread adultery among Roman women.'

Wives and marriage were for legitimate sons - - - prostitution / homosexuality / concubines for recreation

The Roman Empire was littered with pagan idol temples - - - ritual prostitution – In Corinth – immorality was so common - - - the term Corinthian came to be associated with one who practiced immorality

D. James Kennedy: 'Into this defiled world Christ was born.'

Galatians 1:4 - 'Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.'

That is the Christian worldview

Thomas Anthony Harris - - a psychiatrist – wrote a book titled: I'm ok, You're ok'

Wendy Kaminer wrote a critique of the whole self-help movement titled: 'I'm dysfunctional, you're dysfunctional.'

We're not ok as we are

We are more than dysfunctional - - although that is moving in the right direction

Isaiah 53:6 - 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all.' [kjb]

Book of Common Prayer [Anglican 1549]: 'We have erred, and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against Thy holy laws. We have left undone those things we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is no soundness in us.'

There is no soundness in us

III. The Approval of Sin - v. 32

Paul indicts not only the doer of the sin but those who approve of sin

Man reaches the height of depravity when he praises and cheers on those who give themselves to evil

That is what is particularly unsettling about the whole gay pride concept

'The Rainbow Parade' by Emily Nielson – is a book written for children that features a young child going to a rainbow parade for the first time with her two mommies

The book was recently pulled from a Rochester MN library - - because some of the illustrations depicted partial nudity – the book had been read to a group of 3 and 4 year olds

Without the objection made over the nude illustration [which was on the level of Dr. Seuss type of image] - - - the book and its teaching would probably not have been able to be pulled

The content is far more sinister than the one illustration

The content - - - is Romans 1 – the approval of sin

The book takes the on the voice of a young child narrating her day – ‘Today – is the rainbow parade – which means that we get to ride on the train.’

‘Do you see those fairies?’ – mama says – I think they’re going to be in the parade’
‘The rainbow fairy winks at me – my eyes grow wide’ [the fairy queen is a man dressed in drag]

‘The sidewalk outside is filled with people waiting for the parade to start’

‘Everyone is wearing whatever makes them feel most like themselves’
‘Even if that means wearing hardly anything at all’

‘We search the crowd till we find our family of friends’

‘Happy Pride Brenda’ – says mama
‘Happy Pride, Jen’ – says mommy

‘There are so many people in the rainbow parade’

‘The fairy queen – invites us to be a part of the parade’

Young Emily is not sure she is ready

But mommy and mama - - - decide they should join in - - - ‘look – they all are like us’

We begin walking in the parade

On the train ride home – mommy asks: ‘So – what did you think of the pride parade – Em?’

‘I think I’m going to practice pride all year long’

The book is nothing but an attempt to indoctrinate and get hold of young minds

Charles Hodge: 'To take pleasure in those who do good, makes us better; to delight in those who do evil is the surest way to become even more degraded.'

Robert Haldane: 'When human corruption has arrived at its height, men not only commit sins, but approve of them in those who commit them.'

The indictment: man knows these things are evil – but instead of repenting and seeking forgiveness – He approves of them

Conclusion

What should a sinner do?

If we come to see that we are not ok

If we come to realization that we are sinners . . .

It is God's will that we confess our sin - - - believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation -
- - begin walking in the light of the truth

MLJ: 'There is only one truly optimistic view of life, and that is the one which tells us that, though man is down in the depths of sin, the power of God can come and take hold of him and can raise him to the heights, and that it has done so in Jesus Christ our Lord.'

Isaiah 55:6, 7 - 'Seek the Lord while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked man forsake His way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.'

John 5:24 - 'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.'