

# Romans 01 - The Gospel; The Need for God's Righteousness; General Revelation; Abandoned to Sexual Perversion, a Depraved Lifestyle

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## Romans 1

### I. Salutation (1:1-17)

- (1) Introduction (Rom 1:1-7)
  - (A) Writer (1:1)

**1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,**

**1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,**

1 From: Paul, a servant of Jesus the Messiah, called to be an apostle and set apart for God's gospel,

1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,

- "Paul" - author of Romans, his 6th epistle (out of 13), written in about 57 AD. Paul wants us to know three things about himself:

- "...bond-servant" - *doulos*, a slave, a person owned by another (Cf. Gal 1:10; Titus 1:1).

Paul was not in this world to please himself; his entire mission in life, after coming to Christ, was to fulfill the will of Christ (be a "slave" of Christ).

— The Greek word *doulos* appears in 112 verses of the NT, mostly in reference to our relationship with the Lord. A bondservant enters into the relationship voluntarily with the understanding that it's a lifetime commitment, with no provision for release.

— The world today, including most Christians, are all about plotting your own way, taking our own path, finding our own purpose. Bookstore shelves are filled with self-empowerment principles, self-help books, ways to improve your self-esteem. It's refreshing to understand that Paul didn't subscribe to any of this nonsense...he viewed himself as a slave of Jesus Christ.

- "...called" - Paul became an apostle because God put a divine calling on his life (Gal 1:15-16). This calling was from God (Acts 9:15; Gal 1:1), and it was acknowledged by men (Gal 2:7-9).

— The scope of his calling was quite narrow, namely, to proclaim the gospel. As a Pharisee previously, Paul lived a life set apart to strictly observing the Mosaic Law and Jewish customs. Now his calling was to proclaim the gospel of Christ (Acts 9:15; Gal 1:12).

- "...an apostle" - requirements for an apostle (Acts 1:21-22) include someone who has seen the resurrected Christ; God built the church on the foundation of the apostles (Eph 2:20).

— Paul was an apostle "untimely born" (Cf. 1 Cor 15:8) meaning he wasn't around during Christ's ministry; he wasn't around when the church was formed at Pentecost.

— Paul was saved when Jesus appeared to him in a vision on the road to Damascus (see Paul's comment on this, 1 Cor 15:7-9). Paul never got over God's amazing grace. First off, he never got over the idea that he could be saved, and secondly he never got over the idea that God made him an apostle. The man who vehemently persecuted Christians was saved by God and then God's grace allowed him to become the least and last of the apostles.

- "...set apart" - *aphorizō*, the idea of sanctification, being set apart by God.

— God took Paul, who had been stained and polluted by the world, and separated him from the world's thinking, separated them from the way the world does things, and thus

changed him and transformed him so God can use his life in a very significant way.

— This was God's agenda for Paul and it's God's agenda for every believer...as we are sanctified from the ways of the world and learn the ways of the Lord through His Word, we become sanctified (set apart) for God's use. This was a process that Paul was in at the time he wrote Romans, and it is the process that we are all in today as well.

— Paul never thought of himself as a man who had aspired to an honor; he thought of himself as a man who had been given a task.

— It was a "setting apart" *tosomething*—a commitment and dedication, not from things in isolation like the Pharisees. Interestingly, the word "Pharisee" means "separated one" in the sense of being isolated and segregated.

- "...for the gospel" - the holy work that God had for Paul, the purpose of God's sanctifying work in Paul, was to articulate and promote the gospel.

— God calls people for special work before they are even born...God called Jeremiah to be a prophet to the nations before he was born (Jer 1:5).

#### (B) Subject (1:2-6)

##### (a) Predicted in the OT (1:2)

2 which He **promisedbeforehand** through His prophets in the **holyScriptures**,

2 which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,

2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures

2 (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,)

- "...promised beforehand" - the gospel was "promised," not just prophesied, in the OT. Paul wants us to understand that the gospel is not something that came from Paul...God promised the gospel in the OT, through the prophets.

— Paul did not preach an unanticipated gospel, but one that God had promised "through His prophets" (Cf. 4:13-25; 15:8).

— The gospel was not a human invention that tried to make the best of Israel's rejection of Jesus.

- "...holy Scriptures" - the gospel was predicted and outlined in the pages of the OT (Cf. Luke 24:27,44; John 5:46; Acts 17:2-3). This is a point that Paul brought up and taught throughout his ministry, especially to the Jews.

— Some of the OT Scriptures that Paul likely had in mind as he wrote this include: Gen 3:15; Ps 16:10; 22:16-18; Dan 9:26; Is 53:4-5.

##### (b) Centered in Jesus Christ (1:3-6)

(i) His Sonship (1:3a)

(ii) His royal identity (1:3b)

(iii) His humanity (1:3c)

3 concerning **His Son**, who was **born of a descendant of David according to the flesh**,  
3 concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh,  
3 regarding his Son. He was a descendant of David with respect to his humanity

3 Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;

- "...His Son" - Jesus did not become the Son of God at His Incarnation...He had always been, and will always be, the Son of God.

- "...born of a descendant of David" - Paul declares Jesus as the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, who one day will fulfill all of the promises contained in all of the OT covenants.

- "...according to the flesh" - speaks of the humanity of Jesus Christ (John 1:14). This phrase does more than prove that Jesus fulfilled OT promises; it proclaims Jesus' true humanity.

— Jesus became a Man, He added humanity to His deity, in order to become a Mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:4). If you need a Mediator between God and man, who better to do that than someone who is both God and Man.

— Job contemplated the need for a Mediator between God and man (Job 9:32-33). Job had some tough times in his life, and he wanted to get into heaven to state his case before God, but he couldn't without an "umpire" between him and God.

— There is only one way to salvation and reconciliation with God because there is only one Mediator who is qualified to represent us before God, Jesus Christ.

#### (iv) His authentication (1:4a)

4 who was declared the Son of God with power according to **the Spirit of holiness** by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our **Lord**,

4 who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,

4 and was declared by the resurrection from the dead to be the powerful Son of God according to the spirit of holiness—Jesus the Messiah, our Lord.

4 And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:

- Verses 3-4 provide an entire Christology (the doctrine of Christ) in only 28 Greek words.

- Jesus didn't just claim to be deity (anyone can do that), but He authenticated Himself as deity by rising from the dead. Jesus claimed to be God, then backed up (authenticated) His claim through the resurrection.

- "...the Spirit of holiness" - this is the Holy Spirit, and not, as some have suggested, Christ's human spirit.

- "...Lord" - many people use Jesus as a business consultant or life coach, and want Him to ratify our choices. Jesus is not interested in ratifying our choices in life...He's interested in being Lord (ruler) of our life, so that He may live His life through us, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

(a) Grace (1:5a)

(1) To Paul (1:5b)

5 through whom we have received **grace** and **apostleship** to bring about *the obedience of faith* among all the Gentiles in behalf of His name,

5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the obedience of faith* among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,

5 Through him we received grace and a commission as an apostle to bring about faithful obedience among all the gentiles for the sake of his name.

5 By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name:

- "...grace" - unmerited favor. Paul was quite familiar with the grace of God because he was a recipient of it, in abundance.

- "...apostleship" - another gift Paul received; he went from being an opponent of Christianity to being its greatest promoter, from adversary to advocate.

- "...obedience of faith" - objective genitive: *obedience* (produced by) faith; obedience and faith are often linked (Cf. Rom 15:18; 16:26; also Cf. 1 Peter 1:2)

— Because of the Holy Spirit's work in Paul's life, he obtained the ability to perpetually submit to Jesus Christ, who used him to bless the world.

— Because of God's grace to Paul and gift of apostleship that God gave him, Paul had the ability to bring about the obedience of faith among the Gentiles.

*The law lays down what a man must do; the gospel lays down what God has done.*

(2) To the Romans (1:6)

6 among whom you also are *the* called of Jesus Christ;

6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;

6 You, too, are among those who have been called to belong to Jesus the Messiah.

6 Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ:

- Paul received the gift of God's grace, but the Christians in Rome also received that same gift. By God's grace, He called the church in Rome into existence.

(C) Recipients (1:7)

7 to all who are **beloved** of God in Rome, called *as* saints: **Grace** to you and **peace** from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

7 to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called *as* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

7 To: Everyone in Rome, loved by God and called to be holy. May grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, be yours!

7 To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- "...beloved" - Romans was written to believers: the unsaved are never named God's "beloved." In Romans, Paul is not preaching to the unsaved, he is *teaching* the saints.

- "...Grace" - *charis*, God's unmerited favor and His divine enablement; grace is the basis for any true human peace.

- "...peace" - *eirēnē*, does not just mean freedom from stress, anxiety and irritation; it includes the fullness of God's blessing.

*A group of displaced persons, uprooted from their natural home, and on their way to an extraterrestrial destination; not of this planet, neither in roots nor in its ideals.*

[Barnhouse]

## (2) Paul's desire to visit Rome (1:8-15)

### (A) Proof (1:8-10)

#### (a) Paul's thankfulness for their faith (1:8)

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the world.

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

8 First of all, I thank my God through Jesus the Messiah for all of you, because the news about your faith is being reported throughout the world.

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

- It's obvious that Paul wanted desperately to visit Rome because when he thought of them (whom he'd never met), he was thankful for what God had done in their lives.

— Paul was not thankful for their prosperity, their health, or their circumstances, he is specifically thankful for what God had done in their lives and the fact that they have been touched by the gospel.

— The Holy Spirit not only began indwelling them when they came to Christ, but He's been working in their lives in such a way that they have grown and matured to such an extent that God is using them in a missionary sense.

— Think about a church at that time that had no apostolic leadership or mentoring...for it to grow to the point that they are becoming evangelistic, and their faith had been heard of throughout the known world...this is only something that only God can do.

(b) Paul's prayer for them (1:9-10a)

9 For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the* gospel of His Son, is my witness *as to* how **unceasingly** I make mention of you,

9 For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the* gospel of His Son, is my witness *as to* how unceasingly I make mention of you,

9 For God, whom I serve with my spirit by preaching the gospel about his Son, is my witness how constantly I mention you

9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;

- The second proof that Paul wanted to visit Rome is that he was praying for them unceasingly and asking God for His grace in allowing him to visit them.

— How much you love someone should be reflected in your prayer life...anyone can say I love you, but love is an action and the best action to show love to another is to pray for them. Praying for a person is evidence that you love that person.

- "...unceasingly" - *adialeiptos*, to Paul, prayer was as routine and normal as breathing (Dan 6:10; 1 Thess 5:17).

— One of the responsibilities of spiritual leaders is to intercede to God for the people that He has entrusted us to teach, care for, lead, etc. If you teach a Sunday School class, one of your responsibilities is to pray for the people in that class. If you are counseling or mentoring someone, it's your responsibility to pray for them.

Paul reminds us that the real work of ministry is prayer. Preaching is more of a result of the ministry of prayer than it is a ministry itself.

(c) Paul's prayer to visit them (1:10b)

10 always in my prayers requesting if perhaps now, at last by **the will of God**, I will succeed in coming to you.

10 always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.

10 in my prayers at all times, asking that somehow by God's will I may at last succeed in coming to you.

10 Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.

- Paul was not just praying *for* them, but he was also praying that one day he could visit them in person.

- "...the will of God" - if it was up to Paul, he would leave immediately. But Paul had been thwarted in his travels many times, and learned to be guided not by his own will and desires, but by the will of God (James 4:13-17).

— Many times we seek to do things for God, but we forget that it is God alone who will, in His timing, sovereignly open the door. Any many times the door will open, but it is not what we expect. God is always full of surprises.

— In the case of Paul's visit to Rome, he eventually did get there, but he went as a prisoner to appeal a false charge to Caesar.

#### (B) Reasons (1:11-15)

##### (a) To impart a gift (1:11)

11 For I long to see you so that I may **impart some spiritual gift** to you, that you may be established;

11 For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;

11 For I am longing to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong,

11 For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;

- Paul now gives five reasons why he deeply desires to visit Rome:

1. To establish them doctrinally to protect against false teachers (v11)
2. To encourage and be encouraged (v12)
3. To obtain some fruit of the Spirit among the Romans (v13)
4. To fulfill his obligations as an apostle (v14)
5. Last but not least, to preach the gospel in Rome (v15)

- "...impart some spiritual gift" - since the church at Rome was started by the laity, he was concerned that they could be swept away by false teachers, into false doctrine.

— Paul didn't work so hard and endure so much to get to Rome in order to preach the gospel...the gospel was already there (Acts 2:10). There were visitors from Rome, Jews and proselytes, at the Day of Pentecost who heard Peter preach. They took that gospel back to Rome and started a church there.

— Paul desired to get to Rome to edify them, strengthen them in their faith, and ground them in apostolic doctrine.

— Paul talks about false teachers in Rome in 16:17-20 and says that the best protection against false doctrine is doctrinal establishment. He wants to come to edify and

strengthen this church, to protect them from false doctrine.

— Paul had a shepherd's heart, and a shepherd is always concerned about the welfare of the sheep.

(b) To create reciprocal encouragement (1:12)

12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.

12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.

12 that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

12 That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

- When Paul arrived in Rome, the believers there would see the work of God in Paul's life, which would be a big encouragement to them; and, Paul would see the work of God in the life of this church, in each of the believers individually, and this would be a tremendous encouragement to him.

— When believers are in fellowship, I see the work of God in your life and it's encouraging to me, and hopefully you see the work of God in my life, and it's encouraging to you. It's a mutually beneficial relationship where we see God working, and thus our faith is strengthened and we are blessed (Heb 10:25).

— For example, if you go camping and have a firepit, and you want to put out the fire, but you have a few smoldering coals left. You can pour water on it, but that's messy. The best thing to do is separate the coals, so they are not close to each other, so there's some distance between them, and they will extinguish much faster than when they are piled up together.

— This is a perfect picture of the Christian life...we will burn out, become frustrated, fatigued and be disappointed very quickly when we have no fellowship with other believers.

— This is the principle of mutual encouragement, and Satan understands this principle very well. If he can separate Christians, he can frustrate Christians, then he can neutralize Christians.

(c) To obtain fruit among them (1:13)

13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers *and sisters*, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may **obtain some fruit among you** also just as among the rest of the Gentiles.

13 I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.

13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I often planned to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now), so that I might reap a harvest among you, just as I have among the rest of the gentiles.

13 Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.

- "...obtain some fruit among you" - Paul did not view the gospel the way we do today (post-Reformation). We view the "gospel" as people getting saved, but Paul had a much wider view of the gospel than we do today: when Paul thought about the gospel, he thought about justification, sanctification, and glorification.

— Paul thought about how the gospel works its way out in every facet of our salvation, initial salvation (justification) was just the beginning.

— Paul didn't need to get these people saved...they were already saved. But Paul wanted to experience fruit among them...he wanted to edify them, he wanted to establish them doctrinally, he wanted to help them, not in their justification because they were already saved, but in their sanctification.

— Paul had the same mindset when he wrote Galatians (Gal 4). He considered the Galatians his "little children" and he wanted to nurture them. He's obviously not talking about justification because they were already saved. He was referring to sanctification...he wanted to help them grow in their faith. This is the fruit that Paul wanted to obtain and experience with the Romans.

(d) To fulfill his apostolic obligations (1:14)

14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to the uncultured, both to the wise and to the foolish.

14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

14 Both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to foolish people, I am a debtor.

14 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

- God made Paul an apostle, He gave Paul the gift of apostleship, so Paul was *obligated* to use the gift that God gave him.

— When God called Paul to be an apostle, He made him an apostle to the Gentiles, not just to get them saved, but to build up the Gentiles in faith and truth.

— Paul was primarily the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Gal 2:7-8), while Peter was chosen to be the apostle to the Jews. Rome was the cultural center of Gentile activity, which is why Paul so badly wanted to go to Rome.

- Paul says that the gospel that he preaches has no stupid, ridiculous, unnecessary cultural, national, ethnic, societal, economic, or any other barriers...it's a gospel for all people (John 3:16).

- There is an unbiblical Christian (and Catholic) tradition that Peter was the first pope. The Roman Catholic church seeks to connect Peter to Rome, that he was the head of the church at Rome and consequently was the first pope.

— However if we consult the Bible on this, Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (not Peter)...Peter was the apostle to the Jews. Peter went to Babylon (1 Peter 5:13) because the majority of Jews living outside of Israel resided in Babylon (we know this from extra-biblical sources).

— Why would Paul want to go to Rome to impart a spiritual gift to them if Peter was already there? Why would Paul be eager to preach the gospel in Rome if Peter was already there doing a great job?

— Why would Paul say (15:20) that he wanted to go somewhere "where Christ is not already known," so that he wouldn't build on another person's foundation, if Peter was already in Rome?

— Paul's soteriological belief was not to steal someone else's sheep...it was to go get new sheep.

— When Paul got to Rome and was imprisoned, he wrote the prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon). If Peter was already in Rome, why did Paul not issue a greeting or otherwise mention Peter in those letters?

— Answer: because Peter was never in Rome. Peter resided in Babylon and never went to Rome. If you read some of the extra-biblical sources that state that Peter was in Rome, they are dated a full 100 years after Peter wrote his epistles.

— When you understand that Peter was never in Rome, then you can understand why Paul wanted to get there so desperately to provide a solid doctrinal foundation to this new church. He wants to give apostolic oversight to a Gentile church...his calling as an apostle demanded that. If Peter was already there, Paul would not need to go do this.

#### (e) To preach the Gospel in Rome (1:15)

15 So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to **you** also who are in Rome.

15 So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

15 That is why I am so eager to proclaim the gospel to you who live in Rome, too.

15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

- "...you" - Paul is referring to believers (Cf. v7-8); Paul wanted to preach the gospel to the believers in the Roman church. Why did Paul want to preach the gospel to people who were already believers? It goes back to the difference between Paul's view of the gospel and our view today of the gospel (Cf. notes on v13).

— Paul views the gospel to include all three tenses of salvation: justification, sanctification and glorification. Today, we view the gospel as the good news that if people believe, they are saved. That is a narrow view of the gospel when compared with Paul's view, which also includes sanctification and glorification.

— When Paul says he wants to preach the gospel in Rome, he's not saying he wants to come and evangelize them...they were already saved. He's saying that I want to come and help you grow and mature as a believer. I want to use the spiritual gifts that God has given me to edify you and I want to produce that kind of fruit among you.

### (3) Gospel Descriptions (1:16-17)

Paul gives us his thesis statement of the entire Book of Romans in v16-17. These two verses are a miniature version of the entire epistle. Paul will expound on these two verses throughout the rest of the book.

- (A) Not ashamed (1:16a)
- (B) Power of God (1:16b)
- (C) Unto salvation (1:16c)
- (D) For everyone (1:16d)
- (E) Believes (1:16e)
- (F) To the Jew first (1:16f)

**16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the **power of God for salvation to everyone** who believes, **to the Jew first** and also to the Greek.

**16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

**16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God's power for the salvation of everyone who believes, of the Jew first and of the Greek as well.

**16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

- Paul was tempted to succumb to the idea that the idea of the gospel that he had been entrusted with by God was some type of embarrassment.

— This was a real threat because Timothy would one day be ashamed of the gospel (2 Tim 1:8). Timothy was young, a sickly, timid man who was afraid of persecution that was ramping up. Paul had already been arrested, so Timothy became a little gun-shy of the gospel, fearing that people who preached the gospel would get thrown into jail. Paul

had to write an entire epistle (2 Timothy) to shake Timothy out of that fear and shame that he was under.

— There are warnings throughout the Bible about not being ashamed about the gospel (Mark 8:38). Yet Paul did everything in his power to not fall into the trap of being ashamed of the gospel.

— Today, many Christians are ashamed of the gospel, meaning that they are fearful of how someone will react when you give them the gospel, whether they might be considered a little extreme or narrow-minded. Maybe they'll think you're a Jesus freak.

- "...power of God" - *dynamis*, refers to inherent power, power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature. It's where we get the English words "dynamic" or "dynamite," but the root doesn't necessarily supply the meaning or application of this word.

— Paul is not equating the power of God with dynamite (which wasn't invented yet). Dynamite is destructive, it rips out rock, it tears things down, destroys things. This is not Paul's point here.

— The power of God of which Paul speaks of here he elsewhere identifies with the power that raised Jesus from the dead (Cf. Eph 1:18-20). This power operates within us, its goal is "unto salvation," aiming for the wholeness and perfection implicit in the consummation of our salvation.

— "Dynamite" is completely inadequate as a means of raising Jesus from the dead or conforming us to the likeness of Christ. Those who equate *dynamis* with dynamite are attempting to give an indication of the greatness of God's power. But Paul's measure of God's power is not dynamite, but an empty tomb.

- "...for salvation" - the gospel, unlike anything else, has the ability to save a sinner from hell. The gospel is not for reformation, education, progress, nor development, nor "fanning an innate flame." It is for lost man and no other. Men are involved either in *salvation* or in its opposite, *perdition* (Phil 1:28).

— Paul did not say that the gospel is *about* God's power, as if it merely points us to a power beyond our own. Nor did he say the gospel is the *source* of a power we can get and use to save ourselves. The gospel *itself* is the power by which God accomplishes salvation in everyone who believes, something all the might in Rome could not do.

— In the gospel, God is not simply *telling* us about salvation; God Himself is *providing* salvation.

- "...everyone" - the gospel brings the opportunity for salvation to every single person who has ever lived. No limited atonement here...everyone means *everyone* (Cf. John 1:29; 3:16-17; 4:42; 6:51; 12:32,47; Acts 17:30; 2 Cor 5:19; 1 Tim 2:4,6; 4:10; Titus 2:11; Heb 2:9; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 2:2).

- "...believes" - *pisteuō*, the one condition in relation to the gospel that will bring someone to salvation. If you add a single thing to belief as a condition of salvation, then

salvation becomes something that I participate in and not something done 100% by God. Note that Paul does not provide any other requirement for salvation other than belief.

— Over 150x in the NT, the Bible provides belief/trust/reliance upon Christ's sacrifice on the cross as the sole condition for salvation.

- "...to the Jew first" - because the Jews are God's chosen people, they are the ones to receive the first opportunity to receive the gospel. In Acts, every time Paul went to a new city, he first preached in the synagogue to the Jews (Cf. Acts 13:45-46; 17:1-3).

— Paul believed that since Israel is the chosen people, purposed to be a kingdom of priests to God, that he must give them the first opportunity to receive the gospel. Paul just followed in the pattern of Jesus, who also went to the Jews first (Cf. Matt 10:5-6; John 1:11).

— This also comports with the order of how Jesus sets out the instructions for evangelism (Acts 1:8).

— Every blessing we enjoy today as Christians came to us through the Jews: the Messiah, the Scriptures, and the coming kingdom.

- That was then, this is now...is taking the gospel to the Jew first still relevant to us today?

— Rom 11:29 says, speaking about Israel, that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable. Their status as God's chosen people has not been revoked, but continues to the present day and into the future, in spite of the fact that the Jews by and large have rejected Christ (Cf. 2 Cor 3:13-16).

— "first" - *protos*, preeminently (Cf. 2:9-10); the preeminence is due to the fact that God chose the Jews to be the people through whom the gospel would reach the Gentiles (Cf. Gen 12:3).

— Because the Jews are God's Chosen People (Rom 11:1), the custodians of God's revelation (Rom 3:2), and the people through whom Christ came (Rom 9:5), they have a preference of privilege expressed historically in a chronological priority.

— The Jews received the gospel first because they are called to be a light to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-52).

— Paul went from town to town preaching to the Jews first so the righteous remnant of Israel would respond and then take the message to the Gentiles. Only after Israel responded or rejected the gospel did Paul take the message to the Gentiles. Jesus did the same (Matt 10:6).

— When speaking to the woman at the well in John 4, Jesus told her that "salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22). The Jews were doing worship right, compared to the Samaritans.

— During Paul's ministry he sought out the Jews first in every new city (Acts 13:5,14; 14:1; 17:2,10,17; 18:4,19; 19:8). Three times he responded to their rejection of his message by turning to the Gentiles (Cf. Acts 13:46; 18:6; 28:25-28; Cf. Eph 1:12).

### **The Gospel Is Necessary for Salvation**

It is common to hear people, even pastors, today saying that you can't answer every question that an unbeliever may ask you, but you can always give them your testimony. Tell them your story. Some even call their testimony "the gospel." Well, it's not, according to this verse, many other verses, and the pattern throughout Scripture. While what Christ has done in our lives is important, and often powerful, our story will never lead someone to salvation. In every case, for every person, the gospel must be presented in order for a person to be saved. Our testimony is not enough to save someone.

The examples of this in Scripture are endless:

1. Day of Pentecost - Acts 2:14-41
  - a. 2:22-24 - Peter preaches Christ crucified and resurrected
  - b. 2:37 - those who heard were "pierced to the heart"; asked "what are we to do?"
2. Peter & John preach - Acts 4:4
  - a. Peter & John were "teaching" and "proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (4:2)
  - b. Many who heard the message "believed" (4:4) (about 5000 people)
3. Word of God spread - Acts 6:7
  - a. Elders needed to be freed up to teach the Word and prayer (6:2-4)
  - b. Deacons ordained to handle administrative and serving tasks
  - c. Result: Word of God kept spreading, number of disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem (6:7)
4. Philip and the Samaritans - Acts 8:12
  - a. Philip went to Samaria and began to "proclaim Christ to them" (8:5)
  - b. They "believed Philip" as he was preaching the good news about the kingdom of God (8:12)
  - c. Many were baptized (8:12)
5. Ethiopian eunuch - Acts 8:35-38
  - a. The Ethiopian eunuch was returning to Africa, reading Isaiah 52-53 on his chariot ride
  - b. The eunuch didn't understand what he was reading, so Philip explained it to him

- c. Philip "preached Jesus to him" (8:35); the eunuch believed (8:37) and was baptized (8:38)
6. Cornelius - Acts 10:34-48
- a. Peter preached the gospel to Cornelius (10:34-43). Notice that Peter didn't recount his three years with Jesus, his three denials of Christ and how Jesus restored him and made him the apostle to the Jews, or any other of a myriad of stories he could've relayed to Cornelius.
  - b. Cornelius and his household believed, and the Holy Spirit fell on them (10:44)
7. Growth in Antioch - Acts 11:20-21
- a. Men from Cyprus and Cyrene came to Antioch and began preaching "the Lord Jesus" to the Greeks (11:20)
  - b. "a large number who believed turned to the Lord" (11:21)
8. Lydia - Acts 16:13-15
- a. Paul preached the gospel by the river (16:13)
  - b. Lydia heard and "the Lord opened her heart" to respond to Paul's preaching (16:14)
9. Corinthians - Acts 18:4-8,11
- a. Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching the Word of God, testifying that Jesus was the Christ (18:5)
  - b. Many of the (Gentile) Corinthians, after hearing Paul, were believing and being baptized (18:8)
  - c. After God's promise of protection, Paul spent 18 months in Corinth "teaching the Word of God" (18:11)
10. Colossians - Col 1:5-6
- a. They had "previously heard the word of truth, the gospel" (1:5)
  - b. It (the gospel) is "bearing fruit and increasing" (1:6)
11. Thessalonians - 1 Thess 1:5-9
- a. Paul gave them the gospel, then God testified to it in their lives through the power and conviction of the Holy Spirit, and this is why they believed

Other examples:

- Luke 16:27-31, the Rich Man and Lazarus - the rich man wanted Abraham to send Lazarus back to his brothers to warn them of judgment, because they had the same unbelieving attitude as he did. But Abraham told the rich man, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." If they don't listen to Moses and the Prophets (God's Word), they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead. They had what they needed to believe already...the Word of God.
- John 11 - in fact, another Lazarus did rise from the dead, and everyone knew it. Based on this miracle, many came to belief in Christ (11:45). However, even a resurrection from the dead did not convince most to come to belief in Christ (11:46-47).
- Acts 15:7 - Peter recounts how he preached the "word of the gospel" which led to Cornelius and his household believing.
- 2 Tim 3:15: and that from childhood (Cf. 2 Tim 1:5) you (Timothy) have known **the sacred writings** (the OT) which are able to **give you the wisdom that leads to salvation** through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

(G) Revelation of God's righteousness (1:17a)

(H) Justifies and sanctifies (1:17b-c)

17 For in *it* **the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith**; as it is written:  
**"BUT THE RIGHTEOUS ONE WILL LIVE BY FAITH."**

17 For in *it* *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous *man* shall live by faith."

17 For in the gospel God's righteousness is being revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, "The righteous will live by faith."

17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

- The theme of the letter: The righteousness from God is revealed.

- Paul now talks about the specific benefit of the gospel...

- "...it" - the gospel (v16)

- "...righteousness of God" - the subjective genitive (lit., "of God") identifies this as a righteousness that God provides for people on the basis of and in response to faith in the gospel (Cf. 3:22).

— To be saved from His wrath, we need a righteousness that is of God's own nature, not our own. This refers directed to the imputed righteousness of Christ, that is applied to the believer's ledger at the point of faith.

— Unless God is willing to give His righteousness to us, and actually does give it, the mere existence of a perfect righteousness would not be good news at all. On the

contrary, it would be horrific news, because it would increase our sense of condemnation.

— God declares men righteous not by faith as the procuring cause, for the blood of Christ was that; not by faith as the putting forth of a certain faculty innate in man, much less by the keeping of divine commands, however holy and just; but out of *reliance upon His own Word as true*, and that *alone*.

— In response to faith, this righteousness is imputed by God in justification and imparted progressively in regeneration and sanctification, culminating in glorification, when standing and state become identical (Cf. 8:29-30).

- "...revealed" - *apokalyptō*, a revelation or disclosure.

— Paul is not ashamed of this gospel because it is a disclosure or revelation from God that righteousness is attainable by man. The disclosure is that man can be made right with God. But the righteousness Paul is describing will not be a righteousness of our own making (Is 64:6; Eph 2:8-9; Phil 3:9).

- "...from faith to faith" - better translated "by faith from first to last." Paul is communicating that justification is just the beginning, the first step in our salvation. The newborn child of God must continue to exercise faith in order to grow.

— Every aspect of God's salvation comes to us only by faith. This is true for justification, practical sanctification, and glorification. Trusting in God results in full salvation.

— The gospel not only justifies (frees the sinner from sin's penalty), but it also sanctifies (frees us from sin's power). Paul is saying that God wants us to keep trusting His resources, keep trusting His power as we live our life, in the same way we did when we came to faith (justification) in Him (Cf. 1 Cor 15:2).

— The same gospel that frees me from sin's penalty also frees me from sin's power, by the *dynamis* power of God.

— Not only does the gospel justify me, but after that, by Christ's power, the gospel allows me to live a life in Jesus Christ where I can begin to glorify Him in my life.

— It is true that God loves us just the way we are right now, but He loves us too much to leave us in this position...He desires for us to grow up, mature, and become more and more like His Son, Jesus Christ in thought, word and action.

- "...BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *ONE* WILL LIVE BY FAITH" - quoted from Hab 2:4; faith is the vehicle that brings the righteousness of God to people.

— Paul reiterates what he said in the first part of this verse...that believers must continue to exercise the same faith that saved them throughout the rest of their lives.

— The person who believes the good news that the righteous God has proclaimed becomes righteous themselves.

— "faith" - simply believing God; it is not a "work" (Cf. 4:4-5).

*Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that 'the just shall live by his faith.' Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the 'justice of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven. [Martin Luther]*

It was the discovery of the truth that God provides [imputes] Christ's righteousness to us that brought Martin Luther to salvation and as a result, launched the Reformation. Luther knew God possesses a perfect righteousness and demands this standard of us. Luther did not have this righteousness. In fact, the more he tried to achieve it, the more elusive it became. But Luther discovered he had misunderstood God's intention in revealing the nature and existence of this righteousness. This truth was not revealed so men and women like Luther might strive toward it and inevitable fail desperately, as Luther did. It was revealed as God's free gift in Christ, so those who came to know Christ might stop their fruitless striving and, instead, trust Him. They could rest in Christ's righteousness, knowing God had given it to them. Thereafter, they could stand before God, not in their own righteousness, which is no righteousness at all, but in the very righteousness of Christ.

The gospel is the message of how a righteous God makes people righteous.

## II. Sin (Rom 1:18—3:20)

This section of Romans is not the easiest to read and study. Paul stops any mention of the gospel, of God's love for the sinner, of His mercy and grace...and talks just about sin. Why? Here's a word picture: you go to your doctor for a check-up, and he reports everything is fine, you're healthy, but then says that he'd like to perform some evasive open heart surgery on you. Your response is no thank you...I don't have a problem, so I don't need you to fix something that isn't broken.

But if you go to your doctor for a check-up and he finds something wrong and says you have 10 days to live, then, says he'd like to do some evasive open heart surgery on you, you lay down on the table and tell him to wake you when he's done. You're open and ready for the solution to your problem because you understand the problem and you understand the outcome if you don't deal with it (you die). A doctor, in order to get you to submit to surgery, has to give you some bad news. He has to give you the bad news before he can give you the good news. In the same way, we need to give people the "bad news" of sin and their culpability of it before we can give them the "good news."

That's what Paul is getting at here...once we know and understand the problem, we have an incentive to reach out for the cure. People have no understanding of their need for the gospel until they understand their sin problem. The world asks, What is the problem that I have that the gospel is supposed to solve for me? D.L. Moody said that you must get a man lost before you can get him saved. People today do not see their need for the gospel. A weak view of sin leads to a weak view of salvation. A weak view of sin leads to a weak view of the Savior.

In the next passage, Paul will give us a lesson in *Hamartiology*, the study of what the Bible says about sin. If you don't have good *Hamartiology*, you won't have good *Soteriology* (the study of salvation). We have no understanding of our need for *Soteriology* until we understand how bad our sin problem is. Unless we understand who we are in the First Adam, we cannot understand who we should be in the Last Adam. The human race, the unsaved world in general, under the guilt of God, basically does two things: (1) they move into "license"...they do what they want when they want and sin up a storm (1:18-32); or, (2) they become very religious...they instinctively recognize that there is something wrong with them, so they try to fix themselves (2:1-16). That is religion. Paul begins to say in 3:9ff that neither license nor religion/legalism make a person right with God.

Paul implicitly acknowledges that 1:18—3:20 is an interruption in his exposition of the righteousness of God by reprising 1:17 in 3:21. We should consider 1:18—3:20 as a preparation for, rather than part of, Paul's exposition of the gospel of God's righteousness.

(1) Condemnation of the Gentile (1:18-32)

(A) Revelation of and reason for God's wrath (1:18)

(a) Revelation of God's wrath (1:18a)

(b) Reason for God's wrath (1:18b)

**18** For the **wrath of God** is **revealed** from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who **suppress** the truth in unrighteousness,

**18** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

**18** For God's wrath is being revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and wickedness of those who in their wickedness suppress the truth.

**18** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

- This verse serves as a topic sentence for this entire section and it stands in contrastive parallel to v17. With this verse, Paul begins to explain why Gentiles need to hear the gospel and experience salvation.

- "...wrath of God" - *orgē*, a sexual term ("orgy"); unbridled, uncontrolled passion. Here, and often when Paul uses this word, he's not using it in the sexual sense, but in the emotional sense. What Paul is saying is that when God looks at the world, He has unbridled, uncontrolled rage or anger.

— Jonathan Edwards once preached a sermon entitled "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" which aptly describes what Paul is revealing here.

— The wrath of God is an expression of His personal righteousness (which also "is being revealed," v17) and is in opposition to human sinfulness. Therefore people need the continuing revelation of "a righteousness from God" (v17) that He provides.

— In the OT, there are more than 20 words in over 600 passages that speak of God's wrath. These are not isolated or unrelated passages...they are basic and integrated with the most important themes and events in Scripture.

— The NT portrays God's wrath as something that builds up over a long period of time, like water behind a dam. In this passage, Paul affirms that God's firm, fearsome hatred of wickedness is building up and will one day result in eternal condemnation of all who are not justified by Christ's righteousness.

— As Paul will explain, the unfolding of history also reveals God's hatred toward sin and His judgment of it.

— While God's wrath will also be revealed in the future (Cf. Rom 2:5), He is already pouring out His wrath, to a lesser degree, against sin today (Cf. Eph 5:6; Col 3:6). God's wrath is His divine displeasure with sin. Because it is God's wrath, it can have none of the sinful qualities of human wrath.

- "...revealed" - *apokalyptō*, unveiling, a disclosure; "revelation"; the verb here is in the present tense, indicating continued revelation ("is being revealed").

— Paul spoke previously of another revelation: the righteousness of God (v17).

- What is God's *orgē* about? He's angry about the ungodliness and unrighteousness of mankind. What specific ungodly or unrighteous sin is making God so angry? The fact that mankind in general "suppresses" the truth about God, the self-evident truth of God's existence and sovereignty.

- "...suppress" - *katechō*, to hold down; to not acknowledge; this is what mankind does to the drawing of God (Cf. John 6:44) in order to not believe.

— *Katechō* is same Greek word used to describe the "Restrainer" in 2 Thess 2:6-7. It is an active present tense participle, meaning just as the Holy Spirit is "restraining" (holding back) the Antichrist, the human race is actively "holding down" self-evident truth. They are denying what is obvious.

— What is so obvious, that mankind is "holding down"? Divine Creation (Cf. v19-22).

— This is not an ignorant or well-meaning choice; it is "by their wickedness." God has given people so much evidence of Himself that in order to avoid the truth about Him

they have to actively suppress it.

— The truth is suppressed because people prefer sin to the direction the revelation of God would take them.

— Whenever the truth starts to exert itself and makes someone feel uneasy in their moral nature, they hold it down, suppress it. Some drown its voice by rushing into their immoralities; others strangle the disturbance by argument or denial.

Nothing about God appeals to someone who has no redeemed life. In fact, everything about God is objectionable to mankind:

- We want to be sovereign over our own lives, therefore we dislike God's sovereignty.
- We want to be free to practice sin, therefore we dislike God's holiness.
- God knows everything, but we think that is intrusive and offensive, and we try to hide from Him. Therefore, we dislike His omniscience.
- God is immutable; He does not change in any of His attributes. Therefore, we dislike Him because he does not bow to our whims and demands.
- God's glorious eternal attributes contrast radically with our human, tarnished, time-bound, fickle, sinful attributes.

The more you discover yourself to be a common sinner, the more you will realize God's uncommon grace! Failure to give God His due inevitably results in failure to treat people, created by God in His image, the right way. Conversely, people (in their unrighteousness toward others) continue to suppress (*katecovntwîn*, lit., "holding down") the truth (Cf. 1:25; 2:8) concerning both God and man. People have God's truth but suppress it, refusing to heed it. And these wicked ones did this in an attitude of wickedness (*en adikia*).

These verses declare that knowledge concerning God is available to all, as it is seen in the created world, accessible to the entire human race.

(B) God's self-revelation in creation renders mankind inexcusable (1:19-20)

(a) God's self disclosure in creation (1:19-20a)

19 because that which is known about God is **evidentwithinthem**; for God **made it evident to them**.

19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God himself has made it plain to them.

19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

- God has chosen to reveal Himself in two ways:

1. General Revelation (v19-23)

- Things evident to all people: nature, conscience.
- Nature will be dealt with here (v19-23); conscience will be dealt with in Rom 2.

2. Special Revelation (v16-17)

- Available and knowable, but not self-evident (obvious). God has to disclose it to us in a special way (i.e. the Incarnation, Scripture, miracles).

| GENERAL VS. SPECIAL REVELATION |                                 |                                      |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
|                                | GENERAL                         | SPECIAL                              |
| EXAMPLES                       | Nature, conscience<br>(Rom 1–2) | Incarnation, Scripture,<br>miracles  |
| AVAILABILITY                   | All                             | Some                                 |
| ACCOMPLISHMENT                 | Accountability<br>(Rom 1)       | Salvation (Acts 4:12;<br>2 Tim 3:15) |
| FORM                           | Non-written or non-verbal       | Written                              |
| QUALITY                        | Natural                         | Supernatural,<br>miraculous          |

- Paul here is referring to “general revelation” which is what everyone knows about God because of what God has revealed concerning Himself in nature. It is truth (“that which may be known”) about God that is immediately “evident” to every human being. General Revelation is observable, not audible. Four things characterize General Revelation:

1. It is a clear testimony.
2. Everyone is aware of it (it is “plain to them”); we can draw conclusions about the Creator from His creation.
3. This revelation has gone out “since the creation of the world” (v20).
4. It is a limited revelation, in that it does not reveal everything about God (i.e. His love and grace), but only some things (i.e. His power and divine nature).

— Mankind requires “special revelation” to understand salvation. Special revelation is embodied by Jesus Christ, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit’s work in revealing the Bible’s meaning to those who read it.

— See [General Revelation](#) for additional details.

- “...evident within them” - *phaneros*, visible, clear, obvious; this refers to our conscience (Cf. 2:14-15).

- “...made it evident to them” - *ephanerousen*, the verb related to the noun; God made it evident (clear, obvious) to unbelievers because He gave them a conscience.

(b) God's self disclosure renders mankind accountable (1:20b)

20 For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature*, have been **clearly perceived, being understood** by what has been **made**, so that they are **without excuse**.

20 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.

20 For since the creation of the world God’s invisible attributes—his eternal power and divine nature—have been understood and observed by what he made, so that people are without excuse.

20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

- “...His eternal power and divine nature” - general revelation consists of two things that people clearly see in creation: God’s eternal power and God’s divine nature.

- “...clearly perceived, being understood” - both “clearly perceived” and the participle “being understood” are in the present tense, which emphasizes the continuous nature of the action. These things have been obvious and understood since the time of creation.

- “...has been made” - *poiēma*, “workmanship” (Cf. Eph 2:10, only other use in the NT).

- “...without excuse” - general revelation makes man accountable to God to search for truth.

— A spiritual principle: the more light/information/knowledge/insight God gives to a person, the more God expects God to respond to Him in an appropriate manner (Luke 12:48; Cf. Matt 11:20-24).

— Jesus said that Capernaum would receive a harsher judgment in the last days than Sodom will because Capernaum saw something that Sodom never saw: the Incarnate Son of God and His miraculous powers. Because Capernaum had more “light” than Sodom did, they will receive greater judgment if they do not respond to Him.

- To deny this light, to be an atheist today, you can't be passive...you have to work overtime to deny what God has made obvious. The atheist has to actively put his mind to work to dismiss and excuse what is made obvious.
- In 2 Peter 3:5, Peter says that in the last days there will be a movement to deny two events: Creation and the Flood. These are the very two doctrines that are most under attack today by liberal theologians and "scientists."
- Peter says in that chapter (v3) that denying these two realities is a manifestation of the sinful mind. They do not dismiss these things because of a lack of evidence, they conjure up these things from within their minds.
- What is mankind's motive for "suppressing" (holding down) what should provoke him to search for the existence of God? Accountability. They believe if they can explain creation without a Creator, they don't have to be accountable to a Creator. They reason that they can then live life their own way and setup their own value system.  
*The evolutionary origin of man relieves man of responsibility to a personal Creator outside of himself.* [Ryrie]
- The bottom line is that mankind works overtime to suppress the obvious existence of God and the disclosure of Himself in Creation in order to remove their accountability for sin.
- Today, in our scientific age, a common excuse is the faulty argument that science has disproved God. People claim they cannot know God exists or need to see more adequate evidence.
- A second way people try to excuse unbelief is to claim there are too many unanswered questions about Christianity. But people who object in this way seldom investigate the questions or look seriously for the answers.
- When people refuse to acknowledge and worship God, as many do today, the problem is not lack of evidence. Their own irrational and resolute determination to not know God is to blame.

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(C) Results of mankind's rejection of God (1:21-23)

(a) Mankind rejects knowledge of God (1:21a)

(b) Two results (1:21b-23)

(i) Darkened thinking (1:21b-22)

21 For even though **they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks**, but they **became futile in their reasonings**, and their **senseless hearts** were darkened.

21 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.

21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him. Instead, their thoughts turned to worthless things, and their senseless hearts were darkened.

21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

- What has happened to the human mind because it has chosen to go down the road of suppressing the obvious truth of God?

- "...they knew God" - mankind knows in their heart of hearts that there is a God.

- "...they did not honor Him as God or give thanks" - God deserves glory and honor simply based on what He has created (Rev 4:11). Honoring God and giving thanks to Him are primary duties of man to God because of who He is.

— When people reject truth, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to recognize and receive truth.

- "...became futile in their reasonings" - *emataioitheisan*, worthless, purposeless (Cf. Eph 4:17). With such willful rebellion against God, it is little wonder that their thinking became futile (Cf. 2 Peter 3:5).

— The first result of human rebellion against God is that people become moral and spiritual fools; a de-evolution of man's thinking (Cf. Prov 1:7).

— Humanity's willful rejection of God and His revelation affects their thinking; God has left human beings to their own inadequate understanding. Without God, no one can discover spiritual realities. We do not have the ability to discover the light of God by ourselves (Eph 4:18).

— When truth is rejected, in time the ability to recognize and to receive truth is impaired (Cf. John 3:19-20; Matt 13:10-16). To reject God means we can use our minds only to rationalize our error.

- "...senseless hearts" - *asynetos*, morally senseless (Cf. Rom 1:31; Eph 4:18); to reject the truth about God is to have a senseless heart.

— People who have refused to acknowledge God end up with minds that are disqualified from being able to understand and acknowledge the will of God. The result is that they do things that are not proper.

— In v21, Paul stresses that people who have turned from God are fundamentally unable to think and decide correctly about God and His will. This tragic incapacity explains the inexplicable failure of people to comprehend, let alone practice, biblical ethical principles. Only the work of the Spirit in "renewing the mind" (Rom 12:2) can overcome this blindness and perversity.

22 Claiming to be wise, **they became fools**,

22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,

22 Though claiming to be wise, they became fools

22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

- The great tragedy is that at the same time they are becoming futile in their reasoning and their hearts are darkened, they are claiming to be wise. When the true Source of wisdom is rejected (Cf. Ps 111:10), people's claim to be wise is an idle boast.

— As they become more foolish in their thinking because of their suppression of the truth, they are thinking that they are becoming wiser and smarter.

— Technology has deceived us into thinking we are wiser and more knowledgeable and learned that any generation that has come before us.

— We have these things because we are the beneficiaries of accumulated knowledge. Every generation pushes the knowledge barrier forward. As since we're the latest generation, we are sitting on knowledge capital that was inherited from previous generations.

— We are, in our capacity to think and reason, probably the dumbest generation that has ever been alive. We've been deceived into thinking that we're smarter than everyone else.

- "...they became fools" - *emoranthesan*, they progressively "became stupid." They became foolish because they have reversed the formula: the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Prov 1:7), but we are deceived into thinking that we can be knowledgeable without God.

— A "fool" is not simply someone guilty of intellectual folly. It includes the idea of moral folly or wickedness. This is why the Bible so often connects a "fool" with the denial of

God's existence.

— That also describes our current culture. Until man knows his state of sin, he wants no grace. If the evidence of guilt be insufficient or inconclusive, there is no need for a pardon!

*Whenever human wisdom sets itself against God, the result is soon seen in human foolishness.*

(ii) Idolater (1:23)

23 and they **exchanged** the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible mankind, of birds, four-footed animals, and crawling creatures.

23 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.

23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images that looked like mortal human beings, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles.

23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

- "...exchanged" - this explains why the human race has been so determined to invent religions to replace worship of the One True God. Man has an inherent desire to be religious, but the world today has "exchanged" the worship of God for the worship of His creation.

— If man ignores and eliminates God, he has to fill that God-shaped void with something: idolatry, in the form of every imaginable element that can be worshiped, including the environment, because they have a void inside of them and they must fill it with something.

— But whatever they try, it comes up short; it's not satisfying. The idiocy of idolatry is that they have exchanged an incorruptible God with a corruptible idol (Is 48:5; Rev 9:20).

— The more you reflect upon the infinite glory and majesty of the eternal God, the more hideous is the unspeakable insult to Him of any kind of idolatry.

— The ultimate irony in humanity's refusal to glorify the true God is the insanity or stupidity of idolatry described in Is 44:9-20, the worship of gods who are not and the demons who are.

(D) God abandons mankind to passion and consequences (1:24-32)

(a) God gives mankind over to:

(i) Impurity (1:24)

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

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

**24** For this reason, God delivered them to sexual impurity as they followed the lusts of their hearts and dishonored their bodies with one another.

**24** Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

- "Therefore" - because mankind has suppressed the self-evident truth of God's existence and sovereignty, specifically Creation (v18).

- "...gave them up" - *paradidōmi*, "abandoned"; this is one of the most frightening phrases in all of the Bible. God is saying, if that's what you want, I'm going to allow you to have your way.

- The worst thing God can do to a human being is give them what they want. That is a death penalty for mankind...to get what we want. God interrupted what man set out to do at Babel because it was not in the best interest of man (or God).

- We often only consider natural disasters or cataclysmic events as God's judgment, but one of the ways in which God judges a culture, especially one like ours that was founded on Judeo-Christian truth, is that He simply removes His restraint and gives people over (abandons) them to what they want to do.

- Before the Flood, the Spirit strived with man for 120 years, but God said that His Spirit would not strive (restrain sin) with man forever (Gen 6:3). There is a tipping point, a point where a person/nation can go so far in their rejection of God that He simply stops "bothering" them and leaves them to their own devices.

- God's wrath by "giving them up" is not an active outpouring of divine displeasure, but the removal of restraint that allows sinners to reap the just natural consequences of their rebellion.

- God's wrath is also active in another sense: God "gave them up" by turning him (mankind) over to the punishment their crime earned, as a judge does to a prisoner (Cf. Hosea 4:17).

- Many who sin defiantly believe God will never call them into account (Ps 2:2; 10:13; 73:7-12); v24 shows that God is already doling out His wrath (See Tag: Abandonment Wrath).

- God allows people who persist in rejecting Him to go their own way. This punishment is precisely what humanity has fought to achieve since the first man and woman rebelled in the garden of Eden. The problem is, what we think we want does not turn out as we anticipate. In fact, it turns out exactly the reverse. We think that God is a miser who keeps back from us all that would make us happy. We think if we run away from

Him, we will be happy, true to ourselves, and free. Instead of happiness, we find misery. Instead of authenticity, we lose our true identity. Instead of freedom, we find sin's bondage.

— God did not merely take His hands off human beings and allow people to pursue happiness in their own way. God did not let people drift off to nowhere, like releasing an object in space. Rather, He gave them over to the consequences of their rebellion, like releasing a fragile object on earth rather than in space. When you let something go on earth, it does not drift off to nowhere...if falls down and breaks. Similarly, God releases us to the spiritual laws of His universe. In God's universe, the path away from God will always be marked with increasing loss of holiness, harmony, dignity and order, spinning toward uncontrollable chaos and destruction.

- "...vile impurity" - one aspect of mankind's corruption (to which God actively let people go) was sexual profligacy. The frequency of live-in lovers, wife-swapping, and group sex parties today only confirms this result of God's abandonment.

— Sex within marriage is a holy gift from God, but otherwise sex is impurity (lit., "uncleanness") and "the dishonoring of their own bodies" by using them contrary to God's intent.

#### (ii) Idolatry (1:25)

25 For **they** exchanged the **truth of God** for **falsehood**, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. **Amen.**

25 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.

25 They exchanged God's truth for a lie and worshipped and served the creation rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

- "...they" - notice that it is the world, the unbelievers who reject God, who make the first move away from recognizing God. They are making the decision to rebel against God, and God is allowing them to have it their way.

- "...truth of God" - truth that people know about God; the truth of God is not only the truth concerning God but also God's truth concerning all things, including mankind.

— This truth is that people are creatures of God and can find true fulfillment only in worshiping and obediently serving God the Creator.

- "...falsehood" - literally "the lie"; mankind made himself his god in place of the true God: "humanism." The world's lie cannot live up to its promises of freedom and fulfillment.

—How foolish is this? To exchange truth for a lie, to exchange what is eternal for what is temporary, to exchange a relationship with the Creator in order to worship something that was created.

— Pantheism confuses the creation with the Creator, instead of worshiping the Creator it's worshipping the creation in His place. It's called the Gaia Hypothesis, and much of the radical environmental movement is guided by this today.

- "...Amen" - because God the Creator "is forever praised" (in contrast with creatures who are undeserving of worship), Paul added "Amen." This word transliterates in both Greek and English the Hebrew word meaning "so let it be."

— As an affirmation, it places approval on what has just been said.

### (iii) Homosexuality (1:26-27)

**26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged natural relations for that which is contrary to nature,**

**26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,**

**26 For this reason, God delivered them to degrading passions as their females exchanged their natural sexual function for one that is unnatural.**

**26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their [females] did change the natural use into that which is against nature:**

- "For this reason" - because mankind "exchanged" the truth for the lie, God allowed him to degrade himself through his "passions."

— The last thing that God gives depraved mankind, who has rejected Him, over to is degrading passions, homosexuality. The prevalence of this today is one reason why we know it's very late in the hour in terms of judgment in our culture.

— The result was that people exchanged the natural human functions for what is unnatural.

— Homosexuality and all of the other sins that accompany it has become politically protected in our society, but God condemns it! In both the OT and the NT! There are five passages of Scripture that speak directly to homosexuality (Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:24-28; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10; see notes on Lev 18:22).

— Each of the five passages entail a wholesale prohibition of all forms of homosexual sex.

- An argument often used today is that Jesus never condemned homosexuality directly, therefore it's okay. That's an argument from silence. Jesus didn't condemn a lot of things, but regarding homosexuality, He affirmed the blueprint for marriage and sexual union, which is Gen 1-2 (1:26-28) in Matt 19:3-6.

— Under the Mosaic Law, the penalty for homosexuality was execution (Lev 18:22; 20:13; Cf. 1 Cor 6:9-11).

— If someone says I will not believe in God and I will never submit my life to God, then you will get into lifestyles that are contrary to the will of God. They don't consult the owner's manual for life, including sexuality, they are out of fellowship with God, so their lives then spin out of control as a consequence for abandoning God.

- "...gave them over" - *paradidōmi*, "abandoned" (Cf. v24,28)

- "...degrading passions" - literally "passions of disgrace"; since natural desires go with natural functions, the sexual passion that exchanges the natural function of sex for an unnatural function of sex (homosexuality) is what Paul calls a "degrading passion."

— The particular offense of homosexuality before God is the rejection of the appropriate sexual counterpart God has provided. The woman was built by Him to be man's sexual complement, not another man.

- "...women" - *thelus*, the Greek words used here for "women" (*thelus*) and "men" (*arsen*, v27) are not the noble ones meaning men and women, but those denoting sex (gender) only, as in lower creatures.

— The perversions that characterize our present society are nothing new; these perversions deliberately deny the presence of intentional design in our being.

— God gave them over to "passions of disgrace." This is not speaking of natural or normal appetites of the body, or even the abuses of these: adultery or harlotry. It is dealing with unnatural appetites in which all normal instincts are left behind. This involves, as the text states, both sexes engaging in homosexual instead of heterosexual relationships.

— Women deliberately exchanged natural relations with men in marriage for unnatural ones with other women. This is the second "exchange" the unregenerate made (Cf. v25).

- "...natural" - according to God's design of creation

- "...relations" - *kreesis*, the woman's natural, sexual use

— It specifically refers to the sexual "fit"; God designed men and women to "fit" together sexually; their bodies fit together in a precise way to make sexual union possible.

- "...contrary to nature" - "unnatural"; the opposite of "natural."

27 and likewise the **men**, too, abandoned natural relations with women and **burned in their desire** toward one another, males with males committing shameful acts and **receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error**.

27 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.

27 In the same way, their males also abandoned their natural sexual function toward females and burned with lust toward one another. Males committed indecent acts with males, and received within themselves the appropriate penalty for their perversion.

27 And likewise also the [males], leaving the natural use of the [females], burned in their lust one toward another; [males] with [males] working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.

- "...men" - *arsen*, as with "women" (v26), the Greek words used here are not the noble ones meaning men and women, but those denoting sex (gender) only, as in lower creatures.

- "...burned in their desire" - *orexei*, sexual lust, used only here in the NT and differing from the more common word for lust in v26.

— The only natural sexual relationship the Bible recognizes is a heterosexual one (Gen 2:21-24; Matt 19:4-6) within marriage. All homosexual relations constitute sexual perversion and are subject to God's judgment.

- "...receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error" - the wages of sin is death; consequences follow sin like night follows day, because we are living outside the guidelines given to us from God.

— Such lustful and indecent acts have within them the seeds of punishment.

Homosexual sins are not greater than heterosexual sins. All sex outside marriage between one man and one woman breaks the moral law of God (Ex 20:14; Lev 20:10; Deut 5:18; Prov 6:32; Matt 5:27-32; Rev 17:2-4). It is all sin. Such sins result in impurity and the degradation of our bodies. In the case of heterosexual sin, we may well need the Bible to tell us premarital sex and adultery is wrong. But in the case of homosexuality, we do not need special revelation to tell us that God did not make human bodies for this unnatural and harmful behavior. But as men and women let their feelings, rather than God's design and commands, be the overriding guide for their behavior, the gateway to sin is wide open, and the depth of eventual pain, suffering, victimization and trauma is bottomless.

#### (iv) Depravity (1:28-32)

##### (a) Depraved mind (1:28)

28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God **gave them up to a depraved mind**, to do those things that are not proper,

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,

28 Furthermore, because they did not think it worthwhile to keep knowing God fully, God delivered them to degraded minds to perform acts that should not be done.

28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;

- "...gave them over" - 3x in this passage: v24,26,28; see notes on v24,26.

— The beginning of the working of God's wrath *in this world*. This is not a description of the finally damned, but of the at-present-lost: a present judicial action of God on earth where He lets men go their own way.

— This is distinct from the Great White Throne (Rev 20) where there will be no liberty left to indulge their lusts as in this present world.

— The lusts will remain—and probably intensify—but the ability to indulge them will be eternally removed and the damned placed under the visitation of Divine anger.

— "He that is filthy, let him be made filthy yet more" (Rev 22:11)

- The depravity that God "abandons" them to comes in three waves:

1. Depraved mind (v28)
2. Depraved sins (v29-31)
3. Depraved attitude (v32)

- "...depraved mind" - someone who can't think clearly or rationally; a mind that cannot come to the right conclusion; reason unaided by God and His wisdom. A mind that goes its own way and does its own thing, independent of God.

— The reason their minds cannot come to the right conclusion is because their mind is out of fellowship with the God who made them (Prov 1:7). Once a person comes to God on His terms and submits to Him, their intelligence goes way up.

#### (b) Depraved sins (1:29-31)

29 *people* having been filled with all **unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, and devil**; full of **envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice**; *they are gossips*,

29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are gossips*,

29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, quarreling, deceit, and viciousness. They are gossips,

29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,

- The second thing God gives them over to are depraved sins...v29-31 is a list of the depraved sins that the depraved mind wants to commit. These 21 sins describe a failing, broken society filled with broken people and broken relationships; hatred and fear both inside and outside the home.

- "...unrighteousness" - *adikia*, anything contrary to what is right or just; a general word describing the evil effects in human relations that man's suppressing the knowledge of God produces.

— In the Greek, the wordplay highlights God's just retribution: as people "disapproved" of the idea of retaining God in their thinking, so God gave them over to a "disapproved" mind (v28).

— This "letting loose" has led to all kinds of illogical and irrational behavior.

- "...wickedness" - *ponēria*, depravity, iniquity, malice; evil purposes and desires.

- "...greed" - *pleonexia*, the drive to obtain more; claiming more than one's due, greedy, grasping; a greedy desire to have more.

- "...evil" - *kakia*, ill-will; a desire to injure; wickedness that is not ashamed to break laws.

- "...[full of] envy" - *phthonos*, hate toward one who is above us, who is what we are not, or possesses that which we cannot have or do not choose the path to attain

- "...[full of] murder" - *phonos*, murder, slaughter

- "...[full of] strife" - *eris*, contention, wrangling

- "...[full of] deceit" - *dolos*, craft, guile

- "...[full of] malice" - *kakoētheia*, bad character; depravity of heart and life

- "...gossips" - *psithyristēs*, secret slanderer; detractor

### **30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,**

30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,

30 slanderers, God-haters, haughty, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to their parents,

30 Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,

- "...slanderers" - *katalalos*, someone who speaks to defame or injure the reputation of another

- "...haters of God" - *theostygēs*, hateful attitude toward God

- "...insolent" - *hybristēs*, one who behaves with humiliating and unconscionable arrogance to those who are not powerful enough to retaliate. This described Paul at one point before Christ (1 Tim 1:13).

- "...arrogant" - *hyperēphanos*, showing oneself above others; an over-estimation of one's means or merits; despising others or even treating them with contempt.

- "...boastful" - *alazōn*, an empty pretender

- "...inventors of evil" - *epheuretēs kakos*, inventor or contriver of anything troublesome, wicked, injurious, pernicious, destructive
- "...disobedient to parents" - *apeithēs goneus*, non-compliant, impersuadable children toward their parents or authority figures.

31 **without understanding, untrustworthy, unfeeling, and unmerciful;**

31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;

31 foolish, faithless, heartless, and ruthless.

31 Without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:

- "...without understanding" - *asynetos*, unintelligent, stupid

- "...untrustworthy" - *asynthetos*, covenant breaker; faithless

- "...unfeeling" - *astorgos*, unsociable; without natural affection for others; inhuman, unloving

- "...unmerciful" - *aneleēmōn*, lacking or without mercy

- This is the longest vice list in the NT. The purpose is to show the scope of social evils that result when God hands people over to a depraved mind after they refuse to acknowledge him.

— Other NT vice lists include: Matt 15:19; Rom 13:13; 1 Cor 5:10-11; 6:9-10; 2 Cor 12:20-21; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 4:31; 5:3-5; Col 3:5,8; 1 Tim 1:9-10; 2 Tim 3:2-5; 1 Peter 4:3.

### (c) Depraved attitude (1:32)

32 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 **approve** of those who practice them.

32 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.

32 Although they know God's just requirement—that those who practice such things deserve to die—they not only do these things but even applaud others who practice them.

32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

- The third thing that God gave them over to is a depraved attitude, a hatred for God.

- "...they know the ordinance of God" - how could someone who denies God's existence and will never submit to God, know the ordinances of God? Paul will cover this in 2:1-16, teaching us that God has written His laws in our heart through our conscience.

— "know" - *epiginōskō*, to know well; to become thoroughly acquainted with; to understand.

— The natural man knows instinctively that sin brings consequences: every society on earth, Christianized or not, understands that murder is wrong, stealing is wrong, rape is wrong. What gave them this idea was the revelation of God in nature/Creation and the writing of God's laws in their hearts.

— Despite the fact that they clearly know these things, they violate God's ordinances anyway, then they give their approval and encouragement to others who violate them as well. The person in their crosshairs is the person who stands up and says that what they are doing is wrong.

— In Gen 19:9, the homosexuals outside of Lot's door wanting to get inside to sodomize the angels, who wouldn't instead take Lot's two daughters, condemned Lot for being their judge. Lot stood up to them and they turned on him because he was standing in the way of them fulfilling their depraved passions.

Gen 19:9: But they [those at Lot's door] said, "Get out of the way!" They also said, "This one came in as a foreigner, and already he is acting like a judge; now we will treat you worse than them!" So they pressed hard against Lot and moved forward to break the door.

- "...approve" - applaud, cheer on; it's not just that people do what is sinful, people actually come to approve of what is evil. The final step down in man's degradation is his promotion of wickedness. It is bad to practice these things, but it is even worse to encourage others to practice them.

— In such cases, the voice of conscience is stifled and the mind has become callous of the ruin and degradation of others, and takes pleasure in their sinfulness.

- This whole pattern of evil becomes the lifestyle of people who continue to do (present tense implies continuing or habitual action) these very things in open defiance of God, a defiance aggravated:

1. By fully knowing (*epignontes*; Cf. v28) that such things will receive consequences and ultimately deserve death.
2. By encouraging others in the same lifestyle (v32).

How can you appeal to people who have become like that? Every argument you could use would be reversed for them. They are spiritually and morally insane. The case is hopeless. According to Paul, this is exactly the point to which rejection of God and suppression of the truth about God lead the human race. This picture is so appalling that we might consider it a glimpse into hell. By abandoning God, the human race has made earth into a "living hell."

