

Romans 1:18-32
“Four Stages of a Godless Society”

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I. Intro

Paul declared that the “*righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith*” now from verse 18 to chapter 3:20 he precedes to show his readers that man has no righteousness of his own both by nature and choice mankind is completely unsuited to be in the presence of a Holy God. Mankind is guilty and can do nothing to change his condition. ***If God doesn’t intervene than the case is closed!*** In verses 18-32 Paul’s view is the pagan gentile world and he declares that they are as a wholly ungodly and unrighteous. The greatest peril facing the human race is the wrath of God. When you think of the wrath of God most think of lightning coming down upon someone or condemning someone to hell but in this section we see that **God’s judgment upon man is to leave them to what they want!** Paul was writing this letter to Roman believers in a city where the first 520 years of the Roman Empire there had not been one single case of divorce. But things had changed, Roman philosopher Seneca said that at this time “*Women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married.*” He went on to say that Rome was “*stricken with the agitation of a soul that could no longer master itself. Money had become the ruin of the true honor of things.*” And the Roman poet Juvenal said of this time that, “*No guilt of deed of lust was wanting since poverty disappeared in Rome.*” One Chinese man who had never read the Bible read the first chapter of the book of Romans and told his missionary friend, “*I thought you said that this book was an old book, how can it be so old if it so accurately speaks about the events*

going on in China today?” **This section is a great example not of evolution but the four stages in man’s devolution!**

II. Vs. 18-20 Unintelligence

1. 1:18-20 **Unintelligence: Human history began with mankind knowing God, not man worshipping idols than evolving to the worship the One True God.** God revealed himself through His creation from the things He created. Though mankind knew the truth about God they didn’t allow this truth to work in their lives. Instead, **they suppressed the truth so that they could live life the way they wanted and not be convicted by God’s truth.**

The pagan nations are without excuse for their present ignorance and condition because when they knew God, they chose not to thank Him or worship Him. Instead, they choose to create god’s according to their imaginations, all the while claiming that they were more intelligent than everybody else. For Paul the fear of righteous judgment from a Holy God upon unholy people was the first motivation for people seek God’s righteousness as they clearly had none of their own. **People will not seek out the wonders of God’s available grace until they know the perfect demands of God’s Holy Law. A person has no reason to seek salvation from their sin until they realize its power and penalty over them.** We will not ever want the “good news” until we have comprehended truly how “*bad the news is about us*”. Paul proves why the human race is guilty before God by using two phrases:

- a. **Ungodliness:** Which refers to **man’s offenses against God**
- b. **Unrighteousness:** Which refers to **the sins of man against man**

The word “**suppress**” is a Greek word that **means to steer a boat against the current** and what this says is that **the “current” wants to take us towards the truth about God, but our flesh wants to take us in the opposite direction.**

Vs. 19-20 The phrase “*the things that are made*” is one word in the Greek, Poima in which we get our English word Poem from. Paul declares that **God’s creation is a glorious poem, a work of art that is fitted together in a majestic hymn.** The same word is used in Eph. 2:10 where we are told that we are His work of art created in Christ Jesus unto good works. **Paganism and idolatry are not steps in human evolution to enlightenment, from “slime to divinity”.** God’s creation is His billboard to His nature as it continually proclaims His character, nature, and intentions to His creation. Robert Jastrow, an astrophysicist, and director of NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies said, “*We see how the astronomical evidence supports the biblical view of the origin of the world....the essential elements in the astronomical and biblical accounts of Genesis are the same. Consider the enormosity of the problem: Science has proved the universe exploded into being at a certain moment. It asks what cause produced this effect? Who or what put the matter and energy into the Universe? And science cannot answer these questions....For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of his ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been there for centuries.*”

III. Vs. 21-23 Willful Ignorance

2. 1:21-23 **Ignorance**: Man knew God but didn’t want to because then He would have to honor God. Mankind is willing to use God’s gifting but only in ways that he will get the praise for it. The result of this is an empty mind and a darkened heart. The first thing that God exchanged the worship of God for was of course himself.

Vs. 22-23 **Paul describes the character of fallen man by giving two reasons why everyone is born under God’s judgment:**

A. Professing to be wise, they became fools: Fallen mankind justifies themselves by rationalizing their sin. The evidence supports intelligent design NOT random chance yet if the atheist and non-believer admit that than the logical outcome is that the God that created and designed me would have a specific function and purpose for me. So rather than admit that people suppress the truth that they see all around them so that they can continue living the way they want.

B. And change the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like..: This rejection of God's truth inevitably leads to fallen man creating his own religion. Natural man is not "**basically good**", but he is "**basically religious**"! Anthropology in every corner of our globe and in every culture has proved this; by suppressing the worship of the true God they have instead fashioned icons and idols that represent these *four things*. Looking at the automotive industry we can see that the first cars were named after their makers "*Ford, Chrysler, Dodge, etc.*" But as models progressed to the names of birds to "*T-bird, Hawk, Falcon, Eagle*" than that changed to four footed things like, "*Impala, Rabbit, Cougar*". Then finally it has gone too creepy things, "*Cobra, Viper, and Gremlin.*"

IV. Vs. 24-27 Self Indulgence

3. 1:24-27 **Indulgence:** From idolatry to immorality in just one short step. If man is his own god than he can do whatever he pleases to fulfill his desires without the fear of judgment. **The natural result of self-deification is always self-indulgence** and Paul mentions the sins which were so prevalent in the Roman empire. Because of this God gave them up to which means that He permitted them to go on in their sins and reap the sad consequences of their behavior.

Three times we are told that “God gave them up” first to uncleanness and then to vile affections. Then finally we are told that “God gave them over” to a debase mind. If people exchange the truth of God for a lie and worship and serve the creation instead of the Creator the whole order of nature becomes violated.

A. Vs. 24 **The first “God gave them over” to widespread sexual immorality.** The degrading, dishonoring use of our body for selfish reasons. **Immorality is a result of the idolatry that men fall into.** When God gives people over to this it means that He allows them to pursue what they want, and this seems to always be seen in the area of human sexuality. **The societal restraints on morality are removed and people began to sow their wild oats, but God does so that they will realize that they can’t do so without reaping the results.**

B. Vs. 25-27 **The second “God gave them over” to homosexuality.** Because people exchanged the truth of God for a lie **they became confused sexually and exchange the God created procreation and the natural use for intimacy (man for woman and woman for man) for that which is unnatural.** When Paul was writing this the Greek philosophers had exchanged the truth of God for a lie such as Socrates. Legal marriage between same gender couples was recognized, and even some of the emperors married other men. At the time of Paul’s writing, Nero had taken a boy named Sporus and had him castrated, then married him (*with a full ceremony*), brought him to the palace with a great procession, and made the boy his "wife." Later, Nero lived with another man, and Nero was the "wife." The lie is that somehow homosexuality is biological a “*genetic trait*” which cannot be helped and therefore must be encouraged. Paul says that those who practice this behavior receive “*the penalty of their error which was due*”. One of the things that is noticeable among homosexuality is that **they lose their sense of identity as men who are masculine by nature act out as feminine and**

women who were created feminine begin to act masculine. All of this sexual confusion mars God's design for male and female.

V. Vs. 28-32 Unreligious

4. 1:28-32 **Impenitence**: When mankind began this downfall you would think that they would repent and seek the true and living God but just the opposite is true. Because he was left to his own ways by God he only grew worse, so God further gives them over to a depraved mind that cannot discern right from wrong. Paul finishes off by listing 24 specific sins all which are commonly practiced today. They not only do these 24 things they cheer society on in doing them as well.

C. Vs. 28-32 **Finally “God gave them over” to the exploitation of others.** In this terrible list of sins are **the marks of a civilization on the brink of collapse** as they **reflect a contempt and arrogant disregard for others, a desire to exploit other people for personal gain.** The term “*debased mind*” in verse 28 literally means **a mindset that cannot be lived with as it refuses to fit into any societal boundaries and instead seek to legalize all and every immoral behavior.**

The list in Rom. 1:29-31 gives concrete examples of the kind of things which are not fitting. Notice how “*socially acceptable*” sins such as covetousness, envy and pride are included right along with “*socially unacceptable*” sins such as murder and being unloving. English Historian Edward Gibbon wrote 6 volume work called “*The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*”. He explains why the Roman Empire fell and says that 14 out of the last 15 emperors were practicing homosexuals who appointed homosexual generals and commanders. He believed that this made all of Rome and especially the military effeminate and ease pry to invading barbarians. All people are born sinners, but no one is born a homosexual in the end there still is a choice.

Do not make the mistake of thinking that this passage lists the people God can't stand.

This passage is about showing us the very group of people God desires to redeem. In Luke 17:28-30 Jesus said that “*Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot... Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.*” **One of the signs of the end times according to Jesus is the celebration of homosexuality.** When Paul was writing this letter he was in Corinth where homosexuality was being practiced everywhere yet when the gospel of Christ came in Paul writes 1 Cor. 6:9-11 that though “*fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners would not inherit the kingdom of God.*” He goes on to say “*And such **were** some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*”