

## Lesson 4: Indictment of the Pagan Man

### Romans 1:18-32

*Paul charges people who reject God with wicked behavior and suppression of the truth.*

<sup>18</sup> For the **wrath** of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup> because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

*People suppress the truth about God.*

<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> 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.

*God gives people over to their own fallen nature.*

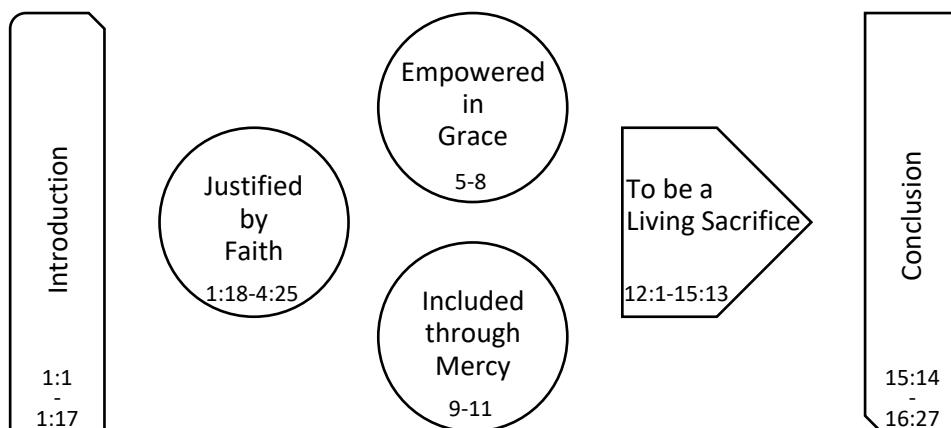
<sup>24</sup> Therefore **God gave them over** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. <sup>25</sup> For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

<sup>26</sup> For this reason **God gave them over to degrading passions**; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, <sup>27</sup> 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.

<sup>28</sup> 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, <sup>29</sup> being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup> without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; <sup>32</sup> 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.

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### Overview of Romans 1:18-4:25: God justifies by faith



We have completed Paul's introduction to Romans in the first 17 verses of chapter one. And now we are moving into the meat of the text, the body of the argument, which according to our organization is going to be separated into three parts. The core of the gospel message is in 1:18 through the end of chapter four. And we are going to call that "God justifies by faith" or "Justified by faith." After that Paul addresses two issues that arise out of the gospel. The first issue is in 5-8. We are going to call that "Empowered through grace." The second issue is in 9-11. We will call that "Included in mercy." After finishing the argument section, Paul moves into the application section, which we will see as a

call to worship as a living sacrifice. Interestingly, that call to worship as a living sacrifice connects with today's text, because in today's text we are going to see humankind turning their back on God, rejecting true worship of God. After we get through the whole gospel argument of Paul and begin the practical section, it is a turning back to true worship with our lives. So, there is this enveloping or connection that has to do with worship from the beginning accusation to the final exhortation.

Today we are on lesson four. This is our first lesson in the first major section of the argument, "God justifies by faith." In this section Paul uses a lot of legal language, the language of a courtroom. What we are going to see is Paul bringing an indictment or a charge against all mankind. And then there is going to be a verdict. It is kind of a surprise verdict. And then we end up with a precedent which is supporting the verdict.

In the indictment section, we will break this into three indictments. We will start with the indictment against pagan man. Then we will move to the indictment against the moral man. And then we will move to the indictment against the religious man. Sometimes I forget where I get things. I do not know if I have come up with the idea or if someone else has come up with the idea. To give credit where credit is due in this case, I am pretty sure it was back in college on a spring break trip that I heard Josh McDowell teaching on Romans, and he used this indictment of the pagan man, moral man, religious man structure. It stuck with me. I find it very helpful.

Today we are looking at the indictment of pagan man in Romans 1:18-32.

There is a major division in the text at the end of verse 25 which is clear, because Paul says, "Amen." When you are saying, "Amen," you are concluding something. In this case, the "Amen" ends the indictment. Paul has made his major point, but then he goes on to develop something that he says in the indictment. He says that God has given mankind over to his own desires. Paul is going to develop that idea of being given over in verse 26-32. I am going to just read right now verses 18-25 and end with the "Amen." Then we will read 26-32 when we get there.

Let's read Romans 1:18-25.

[Read Romans 1:18-25.]

### **I. Paul charges mankind with wicked behavior and suppression of the truth (1:18-19).**

Paul's claim or charge is that mankind is ungodly and unrighteous. And for that reason, God's wrath is being revealed against mankind from heaven. It is not only that mankind is unrighteous. It is not only wicked behavior. There is something more here. Paul charges mankind with a suppression of truth. And he goes on to say in verse 19, "that which is known about God is evident to them," because God made it evident.

Paul charges mankind with being culpable or responsible for knowledge about God. We cannot just say, "We didn't know. How could we know there is a god out there?" Paul says that we are responsible for that knowledge, and we have repressed it. So, our first evil, our first against God is to push down truth about God and then to act in whatever way we want to act which ends up being wicked and ungodly.

Notice how that idea of wrath revealed connects back to the thesis. Paul had said in the thesis, in verse 17, that the righteousness of God is revealed through the gospel. Well, something else is being revealed here, the wrath of God is being revealed. It is the same kind of language, so we should ask, "What's the connection between the righteousness of God and the wrath of God?"

So, what is the connection? Well, they are the same thing. The wrath of God is the righteousness of God. It is a dangerous thing to ask a righteous judge to act righteously. It is even more dangerous to ask a righteous king to act righteously. And in this case God is both judge, he judges us guilty of breaking the law, but he is also king who is going to execute punishment. We see this in Habakkuk. Habakkuk cries out for justice in Judah, and he got it. He did not get what he wanted. He got the revelation of the wrath of God on Judah in the form of an invading Babylonian army.

The idea that a loving God would not act in wrath makes the Bible pretty non-sensical. Its not possible to read the Bible and not get the fact that God is wrathful, that God holds people accountable for sin. It is one of the clearest aspects of the narrative from the beginning to the end, starting with Adam and Eve. God did not just ignore their sin. He banished them from the garden of Eden. And then we follow that up with the flood and with Sodom and Gomorrah and with the Babylonians crushing Judah and you get this narrative that God, however patient and however merciful he is, he will not ignore sin.

It would be wrong to connect God's wrath only with the Old Testament. Jesus refers to the doctrine of hell as much as he does any other doctrine. You can not make sense of the teaching of Jesus if you remove the doctrine of hell. You are just taking one side of the story if you just focus on the love of Christ. The cross makes no sense. If wrath and punishment for sin is unnecessary, then what in the world is the cross? What did God do to Jesus if it was not necessary for a just God to punish sin?

If you do not think there is wrath in the New Testament, then just ask Ananias and Saphira or just check out the lake of fire in the Book of Revelation. The Bible is consistent from Old to New. The Old Testament highlights the grace of God and the justice of God or the wrath of God, just as the New Testament the love of God and the wrath of God.

We do not detach one characteristic or attribute of God from the other attributes of God. God is perfect in his knowledge, in his power, in his wisdom, in his holiness and in his justice. We do not get to pick and choose one attribute. God is not a concept that we make up. God is who he is. We receive him as he is.

Paul adds the reason for that wrath to be revealed. And it is not just that men are ungodly. It is that men suppress the truth about God which leads to ungodliness.

## **II. Paul further explains the charge. (20-32).**

### *A. People suppress the truth about God (1:20-23)*

Paul is going to develop these two ideas, the suppression of truth and the wrath of God. He starts in verse 20 with this idea of the truth suppressed.

#### **1) 20 What truth is suppressed? Invisible attributes – eternal power and divine nature**

In verse 19 Paul has said that what is known about God is evident to people, because God has made it evident. And he goes on to describe that a little more specifically in verse 20. He says, "For since the creation of the world, God's invisible attributes," these attributes about God we can not see, such that if we are going to know about them God must make them known, Paul says, "these invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that men are without excuse."

God the Master produced a master work called the creation or the universe and in that universe, he imprints himself. So, we are to look at the universe to conclude that there is a god. Philosophers have taken this assertion of Paul in two directions. There is the argument from design which states that we should see the incredible complexity and design in the universe and conclude that there must be a designer. The second is the argument of origins or the ontological argument. That argument states that since there is matter, since something exists, and since it is against science to assume something comes out of nothing, we should conclude that there was someone who brought it into being.

#### **a) A Rational Response to the Evidence for God in Creation**

There has been so much growth in science and understanding of our physical universe since Paul wrote these words that it is fair to ask, "Does the indictment still stand?" Our sense of the immensity of the universe just continues to increase. Scientist number something like  $4 \times 10^{22}$  as the number of stars that exist. That is billions and billions and billions. That is how big our universe is. You can go the reverse direction and wonder at how small our universe is. Some scientists estimate that there are  $7 \times 10^{27}$  atoms in one human body. So that too is billions and billions and billions. Seven with 27 zeros,

that is how many atoms there are in your body. So there is both this vast complexity and huge immensity to our universe.

In light of that knowledge and in light of our understanding of scientific processes does it change our basic argument that since we have something it must have come from somewhere, that if there was a beginning there must have been a beginner? Matter does not just pop out of nowhere. And does it change the argument that design points to a designer? I would say, "No. It doesn't." In fact, science is supporting our understanding of the argument of design and our understanding of the argument of origins.

Antony Flew ended the twentieth century as the philosopher of the new atheism. He had written a book called *God and Philosophy* which established an atheistic viewpoint a response to theism or belief in God. He was a member of the Socratic club with C. S. Lewis which is a debate club for theists and atheists. Flew seemed to be impressed with the argument that if you took a bunch of monkey's and put them in a room with typewriters. Given enough time, millions and millions of years, they would eventually produce Shakespeare by banging on the keys.

This is what we might refer to for atheists as the God of time. Anything will happen if you give it enough time. But as we pass the turn of the century and learn more about DNA and information theory, some enterprising scientists decided to test out this popular notion that is getting thrown around that monkeys would produce Shakespeare. Apparently, the British Royal Society of Science tried it out by actually putting monkeys in a room with typewriters. What they got was not one word. That is very interesting that they got not one word since you consider in English that there are at least two words that are only one letter. The monkey's produced no words. It was calculated that the math of getting one sonnet by monkey's randomly banging on typewriters, in order to produce one Shakespearean sonnet, precisely, the chances of getting that is  $1 \times 10^{690}$ . That number is so massive there is no way to understand it. The number of particles in the universe is  $1 \times 10^{80}$ . So, the chances of getting a sonnet is zero. There has never been enough time in the universe, and there never will be, for monkeys to randomly type on a typewriter and produce a Shakespearean sonnet. So, given all the time in the universe, a bunch of monkeys are not going to produce one sonnet, then how do random proteins come together in something much more complex than a poem, in a DNA chain by random chance?

What we see in the universe around us is a high level of design, a high level of information. You take one cell in your body, just one cell in the tip of your finger. That one cell has your DNA. It is the same DNA as every other cell in your body. In that DNA is the information necessary for every other cell in your body. So, the cell in your fingertip has the information necessary for the cell in the pupil of your eye or for the cells in your heart muscle or the cells in your blood vessels. All of this information is gathered in such a tiny space. The incredible reality is that each cell somehow knows exactly which information it needs. The cell does not *know*. But it has been designed to work only off the information that it needs to function. The cells in my finger have all the information necessary for my heart to function and exist. But they do not use that information.

The amount of information necessary for all of the systems of the human body has been compared to the amount of information that is in the Library of Congress. So, with all the books that are written in the United States and registered in the Library of Congress, it is as if the cell in my finger goes into that library and pulls out the one book about my thumb. And it only uses that information. And it ignores all the rest of the information about my brain and my stomach and my heart. There is amazing complexity in the information that is stored and used for life to work.

This information science, when it was really studied and thought through, had an effect on Antony Flew. In 2007 he wrote a book called *There is a God*. He is no longer one of the famous atheists suggested by the new atheism. His name has been removed from the website. He did not become a Christian before he died. But he became convinced that there must be a designer. He wrote this in the book *There is a God*, "If the theorem won't work for a single sonnet, then of course it's simply

absurd to suggest that the more elaborate feat of the origin of life could have been achieved by chance (There Is A God, 2007, p. 78).” <<<https://creation.com/review-there-is-a-god-by-antony-flew>>>

#### b) An Emotive Response to the Evidence for God in Creation

There is a fine-tuning of our universe that suggests somebody designed it. We can come at this idea that the knowledge of God is evident in the universe rationally. We can sit here and make philosophical arguments. But we don't really need to. When we think about the immensity of the universe or when we think about how tiny things are inside of us, that might not really move us. It is too big or too small to even think about. But you get it by standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon or skiing in the alps or sitting at the bottom of a 100 year old oak tree and looking up. You get this sense of bigness or immensity. That there is something more. You feel it on the sea when the waves are crashing. You get a sense of power. You feel it when you are laying on your back, and there are no lights around, and you are gazing up at the stars. The smallness, the delicateness, the design, you see it when you look at a baby's hand. Or you see it staring at a spider's web or line of ants marching across the concrete or the most delicate flower growing out of this ancient moss. There is something in human beings that is attuned to God's creation such that the creation stirs in us these ideas of power and design and beauty and wonder that there must be something behind it. And it is that stirring that should move us to seek to understand rationally, to look for a word from God that will help us to explain this.

#### 2) 21 divine nature – honor God and give thanks to God.

It is the suppression of that truth moving in us that Paul is calling us to account for. He says in verse 21, “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.” We have this eternity in our hearts, as the preacher in Ecclesiastes says (3:11). There is something in us that believes there must be something more, and it is evident in the creation, but it goes beyond that. There is a sense where we ought to rightly give thanks to God and honor him as God.

It is not only God's eternal power that is evident, but there is something about his divine nature, his goodness. With all the sin and suffering and difficult in the world, I still recognize fundamental joys of being alive. I believe in love. I experience beauty. I see things that amaze me. I look at my little baby girls who are growing into beautiful women. And that should move me to give thanks.

Interestingly, you here this purposeful language from atheists or agnostics or spiritual people. They want to give thanks to mother earth or to the cosmos or thank the universe that this has happened. It is that eternity in us. That sense that there is something more that makes us want to attribute that purposefulness or mind or personhood to something that is inanimate. People sometimes cannot bring themselves to say God, to acknowledge God. But they want to speak of the universe as though the universe designs, has purpose, gives meaning.

I think John Lennon was quite wrong on this point. I don't think it is so easy to “imagine there is no heaven above us.” I think it is easy to imagine that there is no heaven of the renaissance kind with naked baby angels and harps, sitting on clouds singing for eternity. That is easy not to imagine. But it is hard for a human being to imagine there is no meaning, no value, no purpose. There is no eternity. To accept the truly atheistic narrative that you die and that is it. Not only you. But that is the truth of the universe. At some point the last star, the last light is going to flicker out. Energy will be fully dissipated through the universe. Everything is cold and dead and lifeless. You never here atheists talking about that narrative. It is a narrative that does not fit with the human heart.

In our suppression of truth, we do not suppress that which comes from God; the idea of love, the idea of justice, the idea of purpose. We want to hold onto these things. But we do want to suppress the idea that there is anyone to whom we are accountable for those things. Whether we admit it or not, that is the basic impulse that Paul is charging us with. There is this impulse towards rebellion,

towards turning away from God. “Even though they knew God, they did not honor him as God.” There is a desire to reject God as Lord, to reject this idea that I am dependent on him, to reject the fact that I have any kind of accountability to him, to his morality, to his law.

The famous author who wrote *A Brave New World* was a famous atheist and a honest atheist. He wrote, “For myself, as no doubt for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality, because it interfered with our sexual freedom” (Ends and Means, p. 270). There is this desire to hold on to meaning in life, love and justice, but also there is this desire for moral freedom, to be our own lords and masters, to be accountable to none.

### 3) 22-23 Instead of turning from Creation to God, Mankind turned from God to Creation

This turning away from God is described in verses 22 and 23. “Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.” The intention is that the creation would show off the glory of God, and we would wonder, then we would turn to God and see his glory more fully. But the opposite happened. Mankind looking at the glory of God and rejecting him as Lord turns their back on God and worships the creation.

John Piper imagines this passage as similar to a person looking into the bright glory of the sun. When we turn our back to the sun long shadows are cast with the form of man, and we see the shadow of the trees or the shadow of the animals, and those shadows stretch out before us. Mankind has done this. He has turned his back on the brightness, the heat, the glory, the holiness of God to gaze at the shadow of the creation. And we have knelt and worshipped the master’s work with our own shadow in the very center.

The list of creatures Paul mentions here takes us back to the Genesis 1 and the creation. We have the creation of man and the animals and the birds and the things that crawl. And reminds us of the long list of idolatries worshipped through human history. The gods of the ancients were greater reflections of themselves, powerful, self-absorbed, lustful and warlike.

I gave some mention earlier to prominent atheists of the past century like Flew and Huxley. We could consider the new atheists, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris. But I do not see atheism as the primary persistent problem for mankind. So many so-called atheists are not really atheists. They believe in something more, something spiritual, some purpose, something real that is not material. The belief in no god takes quite a bit of faith. Atheism is not the natural state of a human being; not even the natural state of a fallen human being. We are created to worship. We are created with souls. Paganism is much closer to our natural state and lines up with our fallen heart.

The new paganism of the West worships the environment, worships freedom, worships love, worships choice. We call people spiritual. And we praise this idea of being spiritual without really having any kind of theology or background or book that grounds our spiritualism. It embraces spiritualism in nature and song, or in some sense of morality or some sense of the other as long as that spiritualism does not make us subservient. We do not want lordship. But if it can bring us control over life’s events, if it gives pleasure, purpose, peace, power, that kind of spiritualism we can live with, we are attracted to. That is basic idolatry. We may have a little more subtle idolatry, but it is basically the same thing.

We have exchanged the glory of incorruptible God, not for no god, but for corruptible things, lesser things, things that help us believe in more without making us believe too much, things that promise what our hearts yearn for, even though they cannot deliver. We seek satisfaction in relationships, in advancement, in nature, in popularity, in position. We have our idols.

*B. Paul explains the punishment: God gives people over to their own fallen nature (1:24-32)*

1) God gives pagan man over to himself (24-25).

God is punishing humanity for rejecting him as creation and attributing his glory to the creation. We have rebelled against the true Lord and king. His wrathful response is surprising. It is not active wrath like that which fell on Sodom and Gomorrah. When we think of wrath that is more what we think. But here we have a passive wrath. God does not actively do something. He simply draws himself out of the picture. He draws back. He pulls himself back from people and from the creation. God is no longer our compass. He is no longer our center. He is no longer our source of life, which means the source of life has been removed. There is none. We become our center. Things revolve around us. And we no longer have a true north. Without God our desires and thoughts have become polluted, so that our own behavior is our punishment. There are consequences to the way we live without God. So, while we are seeking fulfillment, we are going in the wrong direction. We are embracing the corruptible to give us the incorruptible. And that will never work.

Turning our backs on God we are no longer lifted up towards him, to truly becoming human. Instead, our humanness is lowered down to the corruptible and fallen. We have exchanged the truth for a lie. We worship and serve the things of the created realm. The idols of humanity.

At this point in the text Paul gives his Amen. But he decides to develop a little more this idea of being given over. In 26 and 27 he explains what it means to be given over in our desires. And in 28-32 he describes us as given over in our minds.

2) God gives pagan man over to his own desires (26-27).

<sup>26</sup> For this reason **God gave them over to degrading passions**; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, <sup>27</sup> 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.

In developing the idea of being given over to sinful desires. Paul gives the example of homosexuality. He is not saying that homosexuality is the worst of all sins. And he certainly does not want to approve of heterosexual immorality, which for biblical Jews and Christians would be any sexual practice outside the covenant of marriage. He is saying that homosexuality is an example of sinful human desire, showing how far our hearts can be from God's moral vision for mankind.

Turning from right worship of God to idolatry has a lasting moral effect. The very first echo of turning from the glory of God into idolatry occurred in the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve listened to the serpent and turned away. That turning from God immediately affected the heart and mind of Adam and Eve. They began to have desires out of line with moral reality. Paul's use of the words natural and unnatural in reference towards homosexuality take us back to the creation. Something was created with an intended order. We were created in a moral state where a man desires sexual intimacy with a woman. Homosexuality is unnatural to human beings in a biological sense. A man's body is made to fit into a woman's body. Sex is natural between male and female. Along with the wonderful pleasure God designed into sex, sex serves a reproductive function that is only natural between male and female. We could also argue that man and woman were created as moral beings in the image of God, so that there is a natural goodness to sexuality expressed in marriage between a man and a woman that flows from the character of God's moral nature.

Paul is saying that homosexuality gives us an example of how turning from God and falling into a state of human sinfulness has an effect on our passions and desires that move well down the road away from what God originally intended for us. And in this case, in sexual sin. That homosexuality is moral wrong was clearly understood by Jews and early Christians. The clear prohibition comes from Moses in the book of Leviticus.

The commandment in Leviticus for a man not to engage sexually with another man occurs twice in chapter 18 and chapter 20. There is an intentional repetition of laws regarding immoral sexual

practices. The first list states the prohibition. “What is wrong and immoral?” The second list adds the civil punishment. “How should this immoral behavior be punished?” The lists create a sandwich around chapter 19, which is the key passage in Leviticus on personal morality. The foundation idea of chapter 19 is that we serve a holy God and so, we ought to strive to be holy even as he is holy. This is also the chapter Jesus quotes from when he gives us the second great commandment that you should love your neighbor as yourself (19:18).

These three chapters in Leviticus teach about personal moral behavior. They are separated off from religious laws about Jewish worship and from civil laws about governing the nation. These three chapters are about personal morality. And while we can make a case in transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant that the religious and civil aspects of the Old Covenant have been changed by the New, they have been fulfilled in Christ, so no longer apply in the New Covenant. We cannot make that same claim for the moral law which continues in effect from the Old to the New as an expression of God’s own moral nature. This is what is right. It is not a religious convention or a civil convention. It is moral reality. For example, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with eating shrimp. It only became wrong for Jews to eat shrimp when God included that command as a part of his civil covenant to set his people off from the people around them. Adultery, on the other hand, comes out of the moral law section, coming out of the heart of God. When a man commits and promises in a covenant to a woman and engages in sexual intimacy with the woman, that is to stay within the covenant of marriage. That is a moral reality. It is true in the Old and true in the New. What is our vision of sexual morality. It does not change between the Old and the New.

Three things from the lists in Leviticus help us interpreting Paul’s comments here and even suggest that Paul had in mind not only the creation, but he had in mind the moral law given by Moses.

First, both Leviticus 18 and 20, while prohibiting immoral sexual practices, also prohibit certain practices of idolatry. There is a connection between false worship and immoral sexual behavior. That connection continues on into the prophets, and we see it here in Paul. That turning away from God, false worship, has an effect on our moral vision, particularly in our understanding of our sexual desires.

Second, homosexuality is placed toward the end of each list in Leviticus in a way that suggests that homosexual desire is a move further along the line away from the good sexual desire and practice that God intended when he created man and woman.

Third, though homosexual practice, by degrees, may be further away from God’s vision for human sexuality, adultery is on the list and carries the same penalty as homosexuality. In fact, all sex outside of marriage is considered to be grievous sin to God, who created male and female to enjoy monogamous, sexual intimacy in the context of a faithful marriage. So, we are not setting homosexuality off in its own list as though it is an especially perverse sin. Homosexuality is part of a list of sins which include heterosexuality. There is a continuum of sin moving away from God’s natural moral vision for intimacy between a man and a woman.

For Christians, when we understand the moral vision that comes through in the Mosaic code, we understand that this moral vision applies also to us. But in case there is any confusion, Paul restates prohibition to homosexual practice. Obviously, there is what we have right here in Romans. Paul repeats the prohibition in 1 Corinthians 6:9, if we want another example. Interestingly, in that list of sins, homosexuality is lined up with idolatry and also with adultery. There is heterosexual sin, homosexual sin and both paired with idolatry. Turning away from a true vision of God leads to a turning away from a true vision of ourselves. We cannot accurately see who we are, if we do not accurately see God and receive his vision for who we are.

God gave us gender identity in Genesis 1 and 2 as a central aspect of his creation. “And God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it and rule over it.’” Male and female equally share the intrinsic value of being created in God’s image.



We are image bearers. God gives us our identity. The identity of being human includes bearing God's image, holding a special position of greater value than animals and being given a gender of either male or female.

In turning away from the creator, our modern society, or modern paganism has lifted freedom above all virtues, claiming the freedom to define who we are, essentially who we are. It is claimed that we give ourselves value, even choosing our own gender. What an incredible burden we are placing on children. "You have no identity. You must come up with it on your own." In this freedom we are creating confusion. And it is a lie. You do not get to define who you are. You do not get to define your value. There has got to be something that is objective or it all depends on the strength of our mental abilities to convince ourselves of something that may or may not be true.

"Who am I?" If we do not base the answer to that question according to the vision of God, there is no objective answer to the question then it is a figment of our own mental games. "Who am I?" is not a question that you get to answer or that you even have to answer. Not foundationally. You get to build on the foundation of who you are. You get to make choices and choose your own unique expression. But fundamentally, you are a child of the king. You are an image bearer of God. And you have been created male or female. And unfortunately, you have fallen in that image. You have a twisted image.

We have to move on to Genesis chapter 3 and the original turning away from God. Rather than judging the creation, the serpent, Adam and Eve were willingly deceived. And the most obvious, immediate result of their sin was a loss of intimacy. They hid their bodies from each other and they hid themselves from God. There was an embarrassment, a hiding, followed by judgment and blaming of one another. There was a twisting of their desires. Their moral vision became polluted. And the effect was spiritual, emotional and physical as God withdrew himself from his creation and gave them over to their own desire to define for themselves what is good and what is evil.

The older homosexual message of the last 40 or 50 years has been, "We are born this way. We have these desires from birth. How can it be wrong? How can you tell us we are sinful if we have desires we are born with?" Which is an interesting argument. It is a little confusing to me why Christians fall for that, because a basic principle of Christianity is that we are twisted in our very desires. All of us are born with desires we ought not act on. If it is true that you are born with homosexual desire, if that is true it still does not free you to act on those desires.

Interestingly, however, the message is changing. The modern homosexual is becoming increasingly varied. To be political correct, I think I should call it the LGBTQ message, but things are moving so fast, that label is probably already outdated. The new message is that we choose. "Birth does not define us. I define me." It is an overturning of the old message. It is no longer the desire to say, "I am born this way.", but the desire to say, "I define me." And I can change that definition whenever I want to. That is the voice of modern paganism. A new kind of spirituality that embraces a new sexual vision based on personal choice. And it is further and further from the true vision that comes when we see through the eyes of God.

As a Christian, I do not think it is critical to decide whether someone can be born with homosexual desire or whether it came through socialization. I think it could be either. We do not have to choose between nature and nurture in assessing the idea that homosexual desire is a twisting away from the natural moral vision that God gives us in the creation. I am born with greed and pride and selfishness. I was born with confused wiring regarding sexuality. I am given over. There is a fallenness that comes with that. I am twisted from birth. That is a basic assertion of Christianity. On top of that my socialization has created other desires or taken me down other roads where I have built on those sinful desires to increase them to get further and further away from God and his moral created order.

Homosexuals are called to turn back to God for identity. Let God tell you who you are. For all of us that includes laying your desires before God and saying, "This is what I desire. What would you have

me do, my Lord?" And God will call them to not act on homosexual desire. God may remove the desire. He just as well may not. This is true for all of us. The one who struggles with pornographic desire may be freed of that desire in Christ or may struggle through life. The one who is greedy, alcoholic, prideful, lustful, might be freed, he might not be. God deals with each of his servants individually in this process of becoming who he is created to be. We are being restored into the full image of Jesus Christ. Each man, each woman has their own set of struggles. It seems to me that homosexual desire is an especially heavy struggle for a Christian brother or sister to have to bear. It is a very difficult road to walk; to be a believer and to have homosexual desire that you are not permitted to act on. You cannot let that desire lead you into intimacy. That is hard. If God does not remove the desire, then God does not remove the desire. Still, we must name that desire as God sees it. We follow God's moral vision. We do not choose for ourselves. So, the person who with the desire is an image bearer of God. That is your identity. That is your value. You bear the image of God. You are valuable. God died for you. The desire, the sinful, sexual desire that you cannot act on, that comes out of your fallen nature. That is also part of who you are. It is not who you will be forever, because God is renewing us into the image of Jesus Christ. But right now as you struggle as a believer, that is part of who you are. The practice of that desire is sin. It is an act of sin. And God calls us not to go there. God has given us over to degrading passions, passions far from his natural vision for man and woman in their practice of sexual intimacy. If we go there, then we receive in our own persons the penalty of our error. There is an effect

We see the pollution of the image, not only in the effect on our heart desires, but also in the way we rationalize or justify our sin. We have been given over to a depraved mind.

3) God gives pagan man over to his own mind (28-31).

Verses 29-31 contain a long list of sinful behaviors that we can easily recognize in our own society. There may be some organization to the list. In Greek the first four attributes have the same ending and the last five words begin with the same prefix. The effect comes out a little in my English version "untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful". The main point of the list is to show the immorality of mankind. We see these on the news every day. We see them in our neighbors, we see them in our friends, in our children, in ourselves. Not all of them everyday and not all to the worst extent. But these are undeniably fruits that come out of the human heart.

This list strengthens Paul's indictment against pagan man. This is what he was talking about in verse 18 when he said the wrath of God is being revealed against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth. In the previous verses the suppression of truth was a denial of the impulse in our hearts to recognize God from the creation. Here is another kind of truth suppression. Paul says in verse 32. "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."

It is not quite clear who Paul is referring to. Adam and Eve knew the disobedience leads to death. The Israelites knew the commands of God and that disobedience leads to death. And though maybe not as clearly as those who have special revelation, people in general, when they are honest and objective, look at this list of attributes and agree this is wickedness. This is bad. This deserves punishment. Especially when someone acts this way against me and mine.

And yet, while trying to affirm some kind of humanistic morality on one side, we still justify our behavior on the other side. It makes me think of the move by companies and entertainment groups right now responding to the #metoo movement by asserting their pro-woman credentials while continuing to use feminine sexuality in advertising and entertainment to sell their products. From the outside the hypocrisy seems clear. They are trying to assert the value of women on the one hand, while they continue to objectify women for their business purposes. But that it is clear to me from the outside, that is part of the problem. The hypocrisy of someone else can be so glaringly obvious, while my depraved mind excels in the mental gymnastics necessary to justify my own behavior. I see

it in them. I don't see it in me. Part of that justification involves urging others to the same practice. Sin loves company. If I get you to do it, it justifies me. If I get society to agree, we are justified together. So, while our depraved heart urges us to sin, our depraved mind justifies that sin.

Paul has made his charge against pagan man. Mankind has acted wickedly by turning away from God and has compounded that wickedness by suppressing truth about God, truth that is evident in the creation. God has expressed his wrath against sin in the present by giving mankind over to his own wishes. We want to turn from God and God allows it. The effect, which is also its own punishment, is a perversion of the desires and a darkening of the mind.

This is the indictment against pagan man.

### Reflection questions

1. What stands out to you in Romans 1:18-25 as strange or interesting or confusing or important?
2. Does the way God reveals himself in the Old Covenant and the New Covenant feel consistent to you or does it feel to you like the God of the Old Covenant is more wrathful and the God of the New Covenant more gracious? Can you explain why you think you feel that way?
3. Paul makes the claim that all people are accountable for knowledge about God because the creation makes God known. It has been suggested above that this can be true in a rational way as we consider arguments from the origin of matter and the design in creation. It can also be true on a more emotional level in how we experience creation. Which do you feel calls more strongly to your soul, the rational response to God's revelation of himself through creation or the emotive response to God's revelation of himself in nature?
4. Paul charges pagan man with turning away from God to worship idols in forms that come out of the creation. Does that charge still stand? What kinds of idols do people turn to in your society to express worship or seek power over life's circumstances or find satisfaction, fulfillment and pleasure?
5. Paul says that God's wrath is being revealed against mankind, not in an active way, but through a "giving over". God allows a separation to exist between himself and mankind which results in a degrading of man's moral desires and moral judgement. To show how human passion has been twisted, Paul uses the example of homosexual desire. Why do you think Paul uses homosexual desire here as his example of darkened desire? What does that teach us in general about our desires and passions?
6. Along with the claim that our desires are fallen, Paul also says that our rational ability is affected in the moral area. He says that human kind has a depraved mind. When you look at the examples of immoral behavior in verses 29-31, and think about your own society, do any examples stand out to you as particularly relevant?
7. How good are you at rationalizing your own sin? Can you think of an example from your own life when you engaged in activity that now seems clearly sinful, yet at the time you were able to rationalize?

### Further study

For further study on the connection between the general revelation of God in the creation and the special revelation of God through his Word, study Psalm 19 and Isaiah 40.