



## The Epistle to the Romans

### Lesson Number 4



# WRATH and UNRIGHTEOUSNESS

1:18 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 what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, <sup>21</sup>because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup>Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup>and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man; and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. <sup>24</sup>Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup>who exchanged the truth of God for the 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 up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. <sup>27</sup>Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. <sup>28</sup>And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; <sup>29</sup>being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, <sup>30</sup>backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup>undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; <sup>32</sup>who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. (Romans 1:18-32<sup>NKJV</sup>)

## INTRODUCTION

A righteousness from God has been made known through the Gospel of Christ, which is the power of God to accomplish salvation. This righteousness is appropriately described as *"the righteousness which is from God by faith"* (Phil 3:9). It is also represented as *"the GIFT of righteousness"* (Rom 5:17). It is

not conferred upon individuals because they have, through their own efforts, become worthy of such a bestowment – like the conferment of an academic degree upon one who has fulfilled all of the requirements for that degree. The bestowal of this righteousness from God is based entirely upon faith.

The Spirit will now confirm that this arrangement is an absolute necessity. Before the almighty God, righteousness can be obtained in no other way. When sin entered into the world, nature could provide no place through which it could exit. With it came the death sentence, which also could not be reversed by

natural means. To emphasize the nature of sin, the entrance of sin and death, siamese twins that cannot be separated, a single deed opened the door for them. It was not a mass of sin that brought death and all forms of malignancy into the world, but a single act of disobedience. Thus it is written, *“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned . . . by the one man’s offense many died . . . For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation . . . by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one . . . through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation . . . by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners”* (Rom 5:12-19).

### NO ROOM FOR OPINION

There is no room for opinion or conjecture on this matter. Keep in mind, the *“one offense”* through which sin and death rushed into the world was not a murder, or some form of brutality. When compared with the deplorable results sin has provoked, that first deed appears quite small. But it was not small. Sin is never trivial. It is the NATURE of sin that is so reprehensible, not its appearance.

This section of Romans will confirm why sin is so utterly loathsome and repugnant to God. **It is not possible for righteousness to be produced by any person guilty of sin!** The condition spawned by sin can only grow worse. It can never become better. All efforts to correct the human condition through mental or physical disciplines are vain—absolutely unavailing!

This situation is not easily acknowledged by men. The wisdom of this world perceives humanity as fundamentally good, being in the process of development and improvement. This approach is not limited to non-religious wisdom, but is also found throughout the *Christian* community. It is not rare to find devoted *Christians* who are persuaded righteousness—the kind required by God—is the result of keeping a code, or measuring up to Divine standards for living. Significant theological battles have been waged through the centuries over these matters.

Our text will firmly establish that there would no need for a righteousness from God, were man remotely capable of fulfilling the Divine requirements for being righteous. As we will see, humanity needs more than mere direction. Sin has utterly corrupted every part of man, from his body to his soul. There is no part of that which is *“born of the flesh”* that is good or undefiled. It has been rejected in its totality, thus requiring the new birth.

### THE EXTENT OF SIN

After the flood, God revealed to Noah that He would never again destroy all humanity as He did in that judgment. His promise is thus stated: *“Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is **evil from childhood**”*<sup>NIV</sup> (Gen 8:21). Even Solomon knew *“there is no one who does not sin”*<sup>NIV</sup> (2 Chron 6:36). The Psalmist said it, and the Apostles confirmed it, *“They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one”* (Psa 14:3; Rom 3:10).

### DAVID SPEAKS

David was acutely aware of how sin had corrupted all of human nature. *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me”* (Psa 51:5). The Psalmist was not saying he was guilty of transgression from conception, but that he possessed a nature bent in that direction. It only needed opportunity to express itself. Thus he said, *“The wicked go astray from the womb; they err from their birth, speaking lies”* (Psa 51:5).

### THE NATURAL STATE

The *“natural”* is the human condition apart from Christ. It is a cursed state in which no profitability can be found. This is what Jesus meant when he said, *“the flesh profiteth nothing”* (John 6:63). Ultimately, the *“natural”* condition is traced back to Adam, and is visibly attested by our bodies (1 Cor 15:44-46). This part of us—*“the natural man”*—cannot take hold of the things of God. Thus, it is written, *“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually*

## LESSON OUTLINE

- I. THE WRATH OF GOD REVEALED (1:18A)
- II. WHEN RIGHTEOUSNESS IS SUPPRESSED (1:18B)
- III. INVISIBLE ATTRIBUTES SEEN (1:20C)
- IV. THEY DID NOT GLORIFY HIM, NOR WERE THEY THANKFUL (1:21-23)
- V. GOD GAVE THEM UP! (1:24-26a)
- VI. THE VILENESS OF SODOMY (1:26B-27)
- VII. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MEN REFUSE THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD (1:28-31)
- VIII. WHEN MEN DESERVE DEATH (1:32)

*discerned*<sup>NKJV</sup> (1 Cor 2:14).

In his natural state, man is in a futile and hopeless condition. As it is written, *“The LORD knows the thoughts of man, That they are futile”* (Psa 94:11). Again, believers are challenged to remember what they were before their induction into Christ—particularly us Gentiles. *“ . . . at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world”*<sup>NKJV</sup> (Eph 2:12). The state of man apart from Christ is one of alienation (Eph 4:18), death in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1-2), and being under the power of the wicked one (1 John 5:19).

### CONFIRMATION

Our text will confirm this to be the case. Remember, the Spirit is elaborating on the revelation of the righteousness that comes from God by faith, and is revealed through the Gospel. Our first exposure will be to the Gentile world. We will see that a very real need for righteousness exists, and that man is not able to meet it.

Further, the situation is highlighted by the fact that God’s wrath has been revealed against ALL unrighteousness. He cannot make friends with it or overlook it. Divine acceptance demands that the individual be made righteous, else condemnation is inevitable. Few people have seen the gravity of the human circumstance brought on by sin.

## THE WRATH OF GOD REVEALED

***“4:18a For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men . . . ”*** The Spirit will now confirm that apart from Christ and the possession of the righteousness of God, man is in a condemned state. While men boast of God’s love being upon the world, our text will affirm it is actually His wrath that is upon it. The Lord Jesus Himself witnessed to this condition. *“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God . . . He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”* (John 3:18,36). In this text, the focus is upon the total absence of righteousness apart from Divine imputation.

The picture is that all men have sinned, and are dominated by sin. They possess no righteousness of their own, and thus cannot stand before God. They are in a condemned state, and subject to the wrath of God, which is focused against the entire world.

Among other things, we see here that sin is actually antagonistic toward God. It provokes His wrath and calls forth His indignation, and that without exception.

### THE NEED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS EXPLAINED

There are a series of explanations in verses sixteen through eighteen. **First**, the reason for Paul’s readiness to preach the Gospel to those in Rome is because He is not ashamed of the Gospel: *“FOR I am not ashamed of the Gospel . . . ”* **Second**, he is not ashamed of the Gospel because it is God’s power to effect salvation: *“FOR it is the power of God unto salvation . . . ”* **Third**, the Gospel is powerful to accomplish salvation because a righteousness for men is revealed in it: *“FOR therein is revealed the righteousness of God . . . ”* **Fourth**, the absolute need for a righteousness from

God is seen in His wrath and indignation against **all** ungodliness and unrighteousness: *“FOR the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men . . . ”*

God cannot overlook unrighteousness, or be indifferent toward it. It is still true, God *“will by no means clear the guilty”* (Ex 34:7). He *“will not at all acquit the wicked”* (Nah 1:3). I realize it has become fashionable to say “God will take you just as you are.” However, that is

**The picture is that all men have sinned, and are dominated by sin. They possess no righteousness of their own, and thus cannot stand before God. They are in a condemned state, and subject to the wrath of God, which is focused against the entire world.**

not altogether true. The very reason for Jesus was that God could NOT receive us just as we were. Settle it in your mind: there is only one Divine attitude toward ungodliness and unrighteousness: **WRATH!**

Eventually, the wrath of God will be unleashed against all sin—all *“ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.”* That day is appropriately called *“the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God”* (Rom 2:5). There is a *“wrath to come,”* and salvation prepares us for it (1 Thess 1:10).

### What Is Wrath of God?

The wrath of God is violent—the breaking forth of the Divine nature against all that is contrary to it. It includes anger and vengeance, both of which belong to God. Scripture apprizes us that sin provokes Him to anger (Deut 4:25; 32:16,21; 1 Kgs 15:30; Psa 78:58; 106:29; Isa 1:4). The wrath of God is His

reaction to all that is contrary to, and conflicts with, His nature. It is the response of His holiness.

Our text states that the wrath of God is against ALL unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. There is no way for wrong doing (unrighteousness) and “ungodlikeness” (ungodliness) to avoid the wrath of God. If they are not put away, the person in whom they are found will be consumed by the wrath of God.

It is in this sense that *“our God is a consuming fire”* (Heb 12:29). Thus will He take *“vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power”* (2 Thess 1:8-9).

The awareness of this should destroy any casualness or tolerance men have toward unrighteousness and ungodliness. Whatever finely-spun theologies may be developed by men, the wrath of God is *“against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.”* Men may affirm God loves us “warts and all,” but that is not the truth. They may declare that “no matter what we do God loves us,” but that is a corruption of the truth, not a proclamation of it. All such statements are designed to make men comfortable in their sin and deficiency. But faith will not permit us to be comfortable with what is not approved by God, and cannot enter into heaven. The doctrine of God’s wrath being directed toward all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men needs to be declared.

### THE GREEN TREE

Our text associates the revelation of the wrath of God with the Gospel of Christ. Something of it, therefore, must be perceived in the Gospel. In summary, the most extensive revelation of the wrath of God has, to this time, taken place when Jesus died. There the wrath of God was poured out upon the Son who bore all of the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men in His body on the tree (1 Pet 2:24).

In that awful hour, when Jesus was “made to be sin for us” (2 Cor 5:21), He endured the curse of the Almighty–Divine wrath. As it is written, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on

rejected their own Savior!

At this point, Jesus made an arresting statement. “For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” (Lk 23:28-31). What was He saying? He Himself was the “green tree,”

Him up for us all” (Rom 8:32), what will be the experience of those who have chosen sin and remained a slave to it?

If you wonder what God’s attitude is toward sin–the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men–then consider what God did to Jesus when “the iniquity of us all” was laid upon Him (Isa 53:6). If He could not tolerate imputed sin, what about willing sin? The wrath of God has, indeed, been revealed through the Gospel. Man MUST possess righteousness, for no other state is acceptable before God.

**If you wonder what God’s attitude is toward sin–the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men–then consider what God did to Jesus when “the iniquity of us all” was laid upon Him (Isa 53:6). If He could not tolerate imputed sin, what about willing sin? The wrath of God has, indeed, been revealed through the Gospel. Man MUST possess righteousness, for no other state is acceptable before God.**

a tree” (Gal 3:13).

A most precise expression of this circumstance was given by Jesus while He was being led to be crucified. At that time, “there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented Him.” Turning to those lamenters, the Lord said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.” He then told them of the coming destruction of Jerusalem, which He had prophesied earlier. “For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.” What a dreadful judgment awaited those who had

not easily subjected to burning, or the fiery indignation of the Lord. He was “green” in the sense of being alive and productive, with no fault found against Him. There was no sin in Him, and Satan had nothing in Him (1 John 3:5; John 14:30). Yet, He “tasted death for every man,” was “cursed” by God, and experienced the withdrawal of the Almighty from Him. The wrath of God was poured out upon the Son in a manner described as cursing (Gal 3:13)!

Israel was like a dry tree, brittle, lifeless, and easily burned. Indeed, if the indignation of God was leveled against the Son who did not sin, what would the wrath of God do against those who were guilty of sin in the extreme? If, when the sins of the world were laid upon Christ, God did not “spare Him,” but “delivered

Thus the first argument for the necessity of a righteousness from God has been established. Unrighteousness is subject to the wrath of God! Either men obtain righteousness from God, or they will be consumed by His wrath. There are no alternatives to this. Outside of Christ, the best of human deeds are only unrighteousness and ungodliness. As Isaiah said, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isa 64:6). There is no righteousness for men apart from what God confers upon them. The point of this text, is that they were incapable of saving themselves, and unworthy of a salvation from God. It is His mercy that will provide that remarkable salvation.

The introduction of a righteousness from God presumes an absolute need for it, for God does or offers nothing that is not necessary. It is not a luxury. No man is righteous by nature. Nor, indeed, can righteousness be gained by human effort.

## WHEN THE TRUTH IS SUPPRESSED

<sup>48b</sup> . . . who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup>because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.”

We will now see the reprehensible nature of unrighteousness. The KJV reads, “who hold the truth in unrighteousness.” This does not mean they maintain a grasp of the truth while themselves remaining unrighteous. Rather it means they **hold back**, or **hold down**, the truth through their unrighteousness. The word used

here (κατεχόντων) is a powerful one, meaning hold back, detain, restrain, check, hold down, and suppress. <sup>Barclay-Newman</sup>

The compound nature of unrighteousness is thus seen. Wherever it is found, truth is being suppressed and held down. By this we know that iniquity is aggressive. It is not, and cannot be, neutral toward the truth of God. It is not possible to entertain a preference for sin and remain in the favor of God. Nor,

indeed, is it possible to comprehend the things of God while remaining in the grip of unrighteousness.

### THE TRUTH

“The truth,” in this case is the true knowledge of God. The reasoning of the Spirit will confirm this to be the case. Unrighteousness keeps men from knowing God, even though they stand in the middle of revelation. We must see this! It is not possible to know God and be

unrighteous at the same time. Those who affirm they have achieved such a feat have simply lied.

### When Truth Fails

“Truth,” however, is not limited to the knowledge of God, although that is the primary subject of our text. It also has to do with any revelation of heavenly reality. Even though it has been revealed by God Himself, yet it can be suppressed. There are at least two expressions of this circumstance in the prophets. *“Justice is turned back, And righteousness stands afar off; For truth is fallen in the street, And equity cannot enter. So truth fails, And he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. Then the LORD saw it, and it displeased Him That there was no justice”*<sup>NKJV</sup> (Isa 59:14-15). *“So you shall say to them, ‘This is a nation that does not obey the voice of the LORD their God nor receive correction. Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth’”*<sup>NKJV</sup> (Jer 7:28).

In both of these texts, the **effectiveness** of truth is the point, and not the truth itself. The truth of God cannot succumb, failing to have any vitality. However, when men attempt to place it like a *“jewel in a swine’s snout”* (Prov 11:22), surrounding it by their tradition and ways, the truth no longer works effectively. Thus it is said to have *“fallen in the street,” “failed,”* and *“perished.”* A stilted theology cannot accept this Scriptural perspective. Such moves men to believe God goes on working in their midst through the truth, even though they have embraced lying ways with both hands. But this is far from being the truth.

God requires cleanliness in those who bear the vessel of truth, just as foreshadowed under the Law: *“Be clean, You who bear the vessels of the LORD”* (Isa 52:11). The Word of God is “blasphemed” because of human conduct—something believers are admonished to avoid with all zeal. For example, as it is written, older women are exhorted to *“admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may*

*not be blasphemed”* (Tit 2:5). When David was chastened of the Lord for his sin with Bathsheba, the Lord gave this reason for the judgment: *“because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme”* (2 Sam 12:14).

In an arresting discourse concerning a massive falling away from the truth, Jesus declared, *“And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold”* (Matt 24:12). And why is this the

**God requires cleanliness in those who bear the vessel of truth, just as foreshadowed under the Law: “Be clean, You who bear the vessels of the LORD”**

case? **Because truth is suppressed by unrighteousness**, even as our text affirms. The Lord will not allow the truth to flourish where iniquity is preferred.

To put it another way, when truth is not loved, it is withdrawn from prominence. In a poignant statement of this case, the Spirit speaks with great specificity. *“... they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness”* (2 Thess 2:10-12). This principle applies to all manifestations of the truth, whether the rudimentary revelation of nature, or the more precise revelation of the Gospel of Christ. This is a truth little recognized in the religious community.

### WHAT MAY BE KNOWN OF GOD

There are some things about God that **cannot** be known. As it is written, *“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever . . .”* (Deut 29:29). Our text now addresses things concerning God that **could** be known.

This is a great principle of Scripture. Men are held responsible for what they **can** know. When God has revealed something of Himself, and men do not avail themselves of that revelation, they are held accountable for their ignorance. Here again we behold a principle that is scarcely acknowledged in the contemporary church.

There is such an abysmal ignorance of the Word of God and His great salvation, that it is staggering. Even among *Christian* leaders, there is more ignorance of the Gospel than familiarity. It is not an innocent situation! When God places the truth—any facet of it—within our reach, He will hold us strictly accountable for laying hold of it and becoming familiar with it. Men who choose to speculate and philosophize about religion instead of embracing what *“may be known of God”* have, by that very action, suppress the truth! The word of God will **not** work effectually in those who do not believe (1 Thess 2:13). This sadly accounts for the powerless condition of many a professed believer. They have not taken hold on *“what may be known of God.”*

Our text is dealing with the Gentile world who had no word from God. Their testimony, as we will find, was the creation. If God held men responsible for not beholding Him in nature, what will be said of those who have not seen Him in grace, in the Gospel, and in the Person of Jesus Christ?

### GOD HAS SHOWN IT TO THEM

Remember, we are speaking of man apart from either the Law or the Gospel. God did not hold men lacking these revelations responsible for beholding Himself as declared in them. They are only responsible for what God *“has shown them.”* I understand the emphasis of this text to be *“to them.”* That is, God has so arranged things that humanity can behold things concerning Himself. He has created them with a capacity to know Him, and strategically placed him to encourage that knowledge. Here is how Paul stated it to the lifeless Athenian philosophers. *“From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them*

and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26-27).

For some, this is too hard to receive,

but it is the revelation of God. God determined **WHEN** and **WHERE** "every nation of men" should live. He so positioned them in time and place that they would seek Him, extending themselves to find Him. This is the manner in which He made Himself known

to them. He placed them in an environment not only created by Him, but which loudly testified of Him. To be ignorant of God, therefore, is inexcusable, as the Spirit will now confirm. Revelation is always attended with responsibility.

---

## INVISIBLE ATTRIBUTES CLEARLY SEEN

---

**<sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse . . .**" From the very beginning, creation was structured to display invisible qualities of the Living God. All things were "made" in a deliberate manner, in order that God might be more fully known through them. This, of course, makes the evolutionary hypothesis a Satanic lie. There is not an ounce of truth to it at any level, or from any view. Those who attempt to blend Divine creation with evolution through, what is called, "theistic evolution," only betray their ignorance of God. They say God created the world, but did it over eons of time, employing the principle of evolution—which itself is nothing more than a theory. Every aspect of creation was deliberate, with nothing left to chance or long-term development.

This circumstance is precisely why the "invisible attributes" of God are "clearly seen" in the things that are made. There is a precision and harmony about them that cannot be accounted for apart from God. To say that God used lengthy periods of time to create the "worlds" (Heb 1:2; 11:3) is absurd, because time contributes to deterioration, not perfection. The very concept of "time" suggests a termination, and therefore continual demise.

Further, creation was accomplished by God's Word, which confirms its instant genesis. The vast creation was put together in a deliberate manner, and with a focused objective. But that formation was not a lengthy building process. Rather

it was accomplished by Divine fiat—His word. As it is written, "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible" (Heb 11:3). That "word" projected God's character and

**Those who attempt to blend Divine creation with evolution through, what is called, "theistic evolution," only betray their ignorance of God. They say God created the world, but did it over eons of time, employing the principle of evolution—which itself is nothing more than a theory. Every aspect of creation was deliberate, with nothing left to chance or long-term development.**

purpose, stamping them both on the entirety of creation like an artists signature on a painting.

Let those who are tempted to compromise with the purveyors of evolution return to a godly manner of thinking. They are suppressing the truth with their professed wisdom, and draw attention to the creation itself rather than the One who called it into being.

### INVISIBLE ATTRIBUTES

To the carnally minded, this does not seem reasonable: *clearly seeing invisible attributes*. But this is not speaking of mere physical vision. Rather, it is speaking of comprehension or perception. Beholding the creation, men should be brought to understand something about God Himself, the Creator whose signature is found in every facet of His creation. These invisible attributes are "clearly seen," and are incontrovertible.

We will find, however, that sin has so dulled man's capacities that he does not perceive what is evident, or conclude what is inescapable. Remember, the Spirit is establishing the necessity of a righteousness from God. At this point He will confirm that **no person failing to know what can be known of God is righteous. Righteousness is not possible where God is not perceived or known.** That is an axiom with alarming ramifications.

### ETERNAL POWER AND GODHEAD

And what is it that can be known of God through the creation? What are the "invisible attributes" of Him that are "clearly seen?" What is it that can be "understood by the things that are made?" It is His "eternal power and Godhead." Other versions read "eternal power and Divine nature,"<sup>NRSV,NIV,NASB</sup> and "eternal power and Deity."<sup>RSV</sup>

### "Eternal Power"

Notice, the Spirit does not say "power," but "eternal power." This is a power that does not dissipate, and is always adequate to meet Divine objectives. This is the power that makes "all things possible" with God (Matt 19:26). This is a power to create and to sustain, initiate and maintain. The vastness of creation, as well as its duration testifies to such power. While all creation has been consigned to mortality, it does not appear that way to the unenlightened. It has outlasted all living creatures within its confines, including the highest of all creation, which is mankind.

"Eternal power" is what is otherwise referred to as "Omnipotence" or "Almighty." The understanding of this

power is perceived by what it has accomplished. In our text, the creation is the result of “eternal power.” In redemption, the overthrow of all opponents, and the safe arrival of the saints in glory will be declared the result of “eternal power.” As it is written, “*And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!’*” (Rev 19:6).

Creation itself is not the primary focus of attention, but the God who brought it into being with His Word. His “eternal power” is the thing to be perceived, not the so-called power of nature. The evidence of that power is intended to provoke an earnest quest within man to know the One possessing it. Such power, it is assumed, cannot be ignored unless it is done deliberately—in quest for something deemed greater.

#### “Godhead”

The word “*Godhead*” appears three times in the KJV, NKJV, Webster’s English Bible, and Young’s Literal Translation (Acts 17:29; Rom 1:20 and Col 2:9). Other translations say “*Divine nature*,” NRSV, NIV, NASB “*Deity*,” RSV and “*Divinity*” ASV, Douay Rheims, Darbys. This is a most difficult word to explain on a language level. Technically, the word means “*the state of being God*.” This is the first thing apprehended by faith, that “*God IS*” (Heb 11:6). Creation clearly affirms there is a God, a Divine personality that is eternal, and is by nature Head over all, and possessing all power. Those who question the existence of God are the most unreasonable and obtuse of all people. They have ignored what can be “*clearly seen*” by the world in which they reside.

#### The Testimony of Creation

The nineteenth Psalm affirms the consistent testimony of creation. “*The*

*heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard. Their line (chord, voice, or message) has gone out through all the earth, And their words to the end of the world*” NKJV (Psa 19:1-3).

Creation calls men upward, to a consideration of its Maker. The precision with which it continues, and the harmony with which it functions, speaks of a Creator and a purpose. Men have

excuse.” **God will not leave sinners with an alibi for their sin!** Nor, indeed, will He assume the credit for men’s failure to conclude there is an all powerful God.

Men must guard against the tendency to lapse into philosophizing at this point: i.e., Is it possible to know God by studying nature? Can man discover God on his own?, etc. All such speculations are foolish. God elsewhere affirms that “*the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God*” (1 Cor 2:14), and that those in the flesh

**Creation calls men upward, to a consideration of its Maker. The precision with which it continues, and the harmony with which it functions, speaks of a Creator and a purpose.**

developed calendars and clocks upon the basis of the accuracy of creation. The seasons of nature are used to establish seed time and harvest time. All of this testifies to a God with eternal power. If men fail to see this, it is because they are willingly ignorant, considering other matters to be of greater significance.

#### WITHOUT EXCUSE

The Spirit will now confirm that although sin reigns uncontested among those outside of Christ—and although men stand sorely in need or a righteousness from God—yet they are “*without excuse*.”

While this may appear a mere technical point, it is not. Although sin has dulled man’s capacity, hardened his heart, and blinded his eyes, he is still “*without*

“*cannot please God*” (Rom 8:8). Notwithstanding, man can conclude there is a God, and that He ought to be sought. God positioned all peoples for this purpose, and did it AFTER the fall (Gen 10:5,25,32; Deut 32:8).

Men are without excuse for not seeking God, as the following text will confirm. Their willful ignoring of the testimony of creation is inexcusable. I would venture to say that many missionaries do not present this truth, leaving lost people to expect their situation to be justifiable. But it is not. All men need a righteousness from God because they are fundamentally unrighteous. That condition is confirmed by their failure to seek the Lord, a vocation to which they were appointed, and for which they were positioned.

## THEY DID NOT GLORIFY HIM, NOR WERE THEY THANKFUL

“*21 . . . because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became*

*fools, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man; and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.*” The Spirit will now trace the retrogression of humanity. He is

addressing the period described later: “*For until the law sin was in the world*” (5:13). The Lord will not allow man to excuse or explain his failure to be righteous. With unyielding tenacity, He will charge humanity with deliberately



and aggressively avoiding what could be known of God. He gave them the aptitude and the evidence, and they refused it all.

### THEY KNEW GOD

The knowledge to which the Spirit refers is elementary—being aware of God’s eternal power and Divinity. They possessed a general knowledge of the existence, perfection, and eternality of God. This is not knowing God like men in this day of salvation. Notwithstanding, any knowledge of God can be productive, and the suppression of that knowledge, elementary though it may be, is disastrous.

Later, the Spirit will confirm that some inward light had been granted to man, by virtue of being in the image of God. Of the heathen it is written, *“who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness”* (2:15). Thus they possessed some knowledge of God, though certainly not the whole of it. But they were responsible for what they had received. Even in that very basic state, they are said to have *“known God.”*

Those who imagine that a little knowledge of God excuses men for their ignorance and waywardness must look carefully at this text. Knowing that God IS, and that He is eternal, is sufficient to induce men to earnestly seek Him, as they are appointed to do.

I cannot leave this point without mentioning additional sources of the knowledge of God. Adam and Eve had some acquaintance with God. Noah also possessed some key knowledge of God. There was a revelation of His way at the tower of Babel, as well as with ancients like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Job—all before the Law.

### THEY DID NOT GLORIFY HIM

By saying they *“did not glorify Him as God,”* the Spirit means they did not honor Him as He had been revealed to them: an eternal God with *“eternal power.”* They realized He existed, but refused to give Him honor as God. Knowing God in any sense brings with it a solemn obligation to worship and serve Him. God will not excuse men from these

responsibilities. Further, to glorify God is to glorify **Him only**, for He alone is God.

The idea here includes that of communicating the truth of God to others, of declaring what was known of Him, and thus bringing honor to Him. In this process they would have promoted a reverence for God, as well as a quest to know Him more fully. Because of their unrighteousness and appetite for sin, they chose to suppress the truth of God—to bury in the recesses of their minds what their conscience told them.

### THEY WERE NOT THANKFUL

**Those who imagine that a little knowledge of God excuses men for their ignorance and waywardness must look carefully at this text.**

Creation testifies loudly and clearly that it has been made—made by God. That being the case, thankfulness should rise from those occupying the creation. There is to be an acknowledgment that what is possessed has come from the hand of God. But this is not what occurred in the Gentile world. Thanksgiving did not rise to God, even at the lowest level.

Here, I understand thankfulness not to mean being thankful for particular things, like food, clothing, etc. Rather, this is a thankfulness expressed in a fervent quest for the God of creation. He who made a universe of harmony and order, with beauty and grandeur, is surely capable of directing and blessing the affairs of men. But they were not thankful enough to pursue the knowledge of God, developing it and coming to know Him more. They did not use what they had!

### Vain Imaginations

Notice how the failure of men to glory God and be thankful did not end there. Their thoughts then became futile: *“but became vain in their imaginations.”* The word *“imaginations”* does not mean

they were merely dreaming with no regard to practicality. Their reasonings, or thoughts, were profound in their own estimation, but futile and vain imaginations from God’s perspective (which is the only valid one). Other versions emphasize this: *“but their thinking became futile”*<sup>NIV</sup> . . . *“they became futile in their speculations”*<sup>NASB</sup> . . . *“but became futile in their thoughts.”*<sup>NKJV</sup>

Since the manner in which a man thinks indicates what he really is (Prov 23:7), this means the world became pointless and meaningless in its living.

This is the condition that prevailed in Noah’s day. *“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”* (Gen 6:5). Following the flood, God told Noah He would never again destroy all humanity with a flood. The reason was because no improvement would ever be realized in the natural man. *“The LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done”* (Gen 8:21). The idea is that man’s thoughts were given over to vanity as soon as he refused to give glory and thanksgiving to God. I am persuaded that few people see this as the outcome of rejecting the knowledge of God.

### DARKENED HEARTS

When men do not avail themselves of the provisions of God, they must suffer the consequences of their negligence. Hearts that are not given to glorifying and thanking God will be filled with darkness. Jesus said, *“But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness”* (Matt 6:23).

This kind of darkness is not only the result of failing to glorify and thank God, it is imposed upon men by the God of judgment. This is nothing less than the withholding of light, which is the meaning of the word *“darkened”*: deprived of light.<sup>Strong’s</sup> The ostrich, therefore, is not the only one deprived of wisdom (Job



39:13-17).

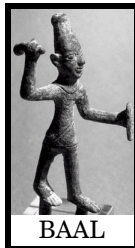
### FOOLISH WISDOM

The irony of the situation is that men thought they were wise in their foolish thoughts. *"Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."* while wearing the badge of intelligence, they actually became simpletons. Abandoning the testimony of creation, they concocted their own ideas about God. Their ideas were not only wrong, they were in sharp conflict with the true God, who possessed *"eternal power."* Rather than seeking for God to reveal Himself, they took it upon themselves to arrive at a knowledge of Him through their own reasoning. The extent of their ideas will be expressed in the next verse.

It should not surprise us that this tendency remains among all men. Tragically, it has even penetrated the so-called *Christian* community. Men are still developing their own ideas about God instead of embracing the revelation He has given. But all such wisdom is foolishness. How poignantly it is stated in First Corinthians: *"in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God . . ."* (1:21). Left to themselves, and because of sin, men became fools, even though they professed themselves to be wise.

### CHANGING THE GLORY OF GOD

The extent to which man fell is seen in the conceptions of God that he developed. In all of them—whether idols of wood and stone, or mental conceptions—there is a corruption of God. Our text states they *"changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man; and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things."*



BAAL

Men threw their energies into the creation of false gods, together with their images. They knew by the testimony of creation that there was a God, yet they refused to glorify Him as God. Instead, they constructed gods of their own making. A few that are mentioned in Scripture are listed below.

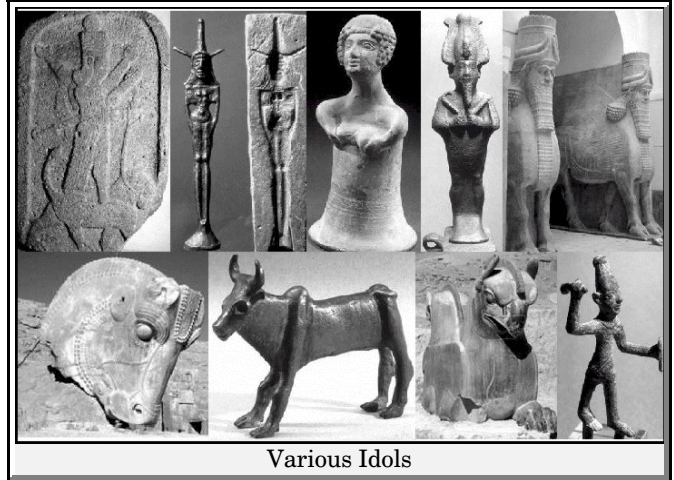
- Adrammelech, Mesopotamia (2 Kgs 17:31).

- Amon, Egypt (Nah 3:8)
- Anammelech, Babylonian (2 Kgs 17:31)
- Anat, Canaanites (Jer 44:19)
- Artemis (Diana), Greeks (Acts 19:35)
- Baal, Syria (1 Kgs 18:19)
- Ashima, Samaria (2 Kgs 17:30)
- Ashoreth, Canaanites (1 Kgs 11:5)
- Baalberith, Shechem (Judges 9:4)
- Baalpeor, Moabites (Psa 106:28)
- Bel, Babylon (Jer 51:44)
- Chemosh, Moabites (Judges 11:24)
- Dagon, Philistines (Judges 16:23)
- Merodach, Babylonian (Jer 50:2)
- Milcom, Ammonites (2 Kgs 11:5)
- Moloch, Ammonites (Amos 5:26)
- Nergal, Babylonian (2 Kgs 17:30)
- Nibhaz, Avites (2 Kgs 17:31)
- Nisroch, Assyria (2 Kgs 19:36)
- Rimmon, Damascus (2 Kgs 5:18)
- Succothbenoth, Samaria (2 Kgs 17:30)
- Tamuz, Babylonian (Ezek 8:14)
- Tartak, Samaria (2 Kgs 17:31)
- Zeus (Jupiter), Greek (Acts 14:11-12)

Notice, they did not change God, but the *"glory of God."* That is, they changed how He appeared to men. Instead of One characterized by *"eternal power"* and Divinity, they likened Him to things corruptible, beginning with man, and descending to the creeping things of the earth.

All of this was an attempt to conform God to human reasoning. Men were creating a god they could understand. Men only make an image of things they think they understand. You cannot make an image of a mystery, or a complex problem.

Further, their images reflected their ideas of God, which were gross and depraved. They were not content to liken God to a man, but even associated Him with beasts of the earth and serpents that slither along the ground. They also sought to combine human and animal traits, vainly attempting to explain Deity. Their



Various Idols

images were grotesque.

From another perspective, men deified both their lusts and their fears. They concocted fertility and love goddesses to allow the unrestrained indulgence of their depraved appetites. They made gods of their fears, thinking to gain some form of protection.

In all of this, they were zealous to change the glory of God, but not to retain Him in their knowledge. They were not content to seek Him as they were appointed to do, but made images as though they had finally comprehended Him. The universality of these attempts confirm the terrible effects of sin.

All of this is designed to teach us that men are incapable of developing a righteousness of their own. Further, their deeds were not innocent. We will find the judgment of God was leveled upon men for indulging in such a vain pursuit as *"changing the glory of God."*

I cannot leave this section without drawing attention to the creation of many *Christian* gods in our day. Men have conjured up mental images of God that are devoid of truth, and a reproach to God. Some have conceived of God as tolerant of sin and indifferent to man's moral uncleanness. Others have seen him as a God that saves men without their own involvement. Some perceive Him as primarily interested in improving life in this world. All of these are idols, just as surely as the golden calf and Nebuchadnezzar's great image. They are purely the creation of men.

## GOD GAVE THEM UP!

***"<sup>24</sup>Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup>who exchanged the truth of God for the 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 up to vile passions."*** The Gospel announces a righteousness from God—an indispensable righteousness. With great power, the Spirit is confirming men cannot do without "a righteousness from God." They have proved by their conduct that sin has blasted all of their capacities, so that they cannot think correctly about God. The fact that not a single soul has ever stumbled upon the truth about God proves this to be the case. No person has ever known God to any measurable degree independent of a Divine initiative. Further, the initiative had to be greater than a mere appearance in nature. While the whole creation testifies to the "eternal power and Divinity" of God, it cannot circumscribe the heart, sensitize the inner ear, or of clarify human perception. The universality of sin, without a single exception, makes this incontrovertible.

For this reason, God wrote off the entire natural order. He will even remove restraints of both conscience and providence from man, confirming what he will do when left to himself. Remember, this is a judgment incurred because the testimony of creation was ignored, men became unthankful, and went about to create their own gods.

### WHEN GOD GIVES MEN UP

Those who imagine you can dabble in sin and still remain immune from Divine judgment need to consider this passage. Here is how God responded to those with no written Law from heaven or copy of the Scriptures. He *"gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them."*<sup>NASB</sup>

### God Can Restrain Men From Sin

From this we learn that, under

ordinary circumstances, the Lord does restrain men from excessive involvement in sin. Whatever you may think of the free will of man, you do well not to ascribe too much credit to it. On one occasion, God revealed His control of man's involvement in sin to Abimelech, king of Gerar. He had taken Abraham's wife Sarah to himself, supposing she was only Abraham's sister. Coming to Abimelech in a dream, God told him, *"Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for*

**No person has ever known God to any measurable degree independent of a Divine initiative. Further, the initiative had to be greater than a mere appearance in nature.**

*she is a man's wife."* The king replied that he had not come near to Sarah, declaring he had not intended to take another man's wife. God then explained to him, *"Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her"*<sup>NKJV</sup> (Gen 22:2-6).

That is not the only incident of God restraining people. He did not allow Laban to hurt Jacob (Gen 31:7). He did not allow the hostile cities around the sons of Jacob to hurt them as they journeyed (Gen 35:5). When the Israelites observed their annual feasts, and the land seemed defenseless, God said *"For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land"* (Ex 34:24). Abigail confessed that God had withheld David from coming to shed blood. David acknowledged this was precisely the case (1 Sam 25:26,34).

### Divine Restraint Can Be Removed

But lest men assume God will always keep them from deep and profound sin, the Spirit delivers the text before us. There comes a time when God can be so

provoked that all restraints are removed. In such a case, men are delivered over to the very pursuits that will cause their condemnation.

The human condition is so serious that, unrestrained, men are capable of the most heinous and unreasonable sins. Let men argue about whether we are "totally depraved" or not, and what that may or may not involve. But let us not allow our hearts to be distracted from the truth of the case. Apart from being in Christ, the heart of man is filled with all manner of impurities and sinful passions. The natural condition of man is well stated by the prophet Jeremiah. *"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"*<sup>NIV</sup> (Jer 17:9).

It does not say God delivered them over to the devil—although there are occasions when this is done (1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:20). Nor, indeed, does he say they were delivered over to demonic powers, although the fall of spiritual Babylon is said to result in this (Rev 18:2). God delivered them over to the lusts of their own hearts! We will shortly see the devastating result of this action: God giving men over to the sinful lusts of their own hearts.

Thus, like the bottomless pit was opened by an angel from heaven (Rev 9:1), so God so judged men as to release the wretchedness that was inherent within them. Should anyone still doubt the need for a righteousness from God, let them ponder the depths to which men sink when they are given over to their lusts by God. Indeed, *"it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"* (Heb 10:31).

### DISHONORING THEIR BODIES

The result of being given over to the lusts of their hearts was the degrading of their bodies among themselves. One of the indications of Divine judgment is the degrading of the body. This refers to all forms of moral impurity, and will be covered extensively in the succeeding verses.

*The need for a righteousness from God is firmly established by the universal effect of sin upon our race, by Given O. Blakely*

The point to be seen here is that the body belongs to the Lord. As it is written, *“Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord”* (1 Cor 6:13). The body is thus degraded when it becomes the means of self gratification through immorality.

### The Spread of Evil In Our Day

The Western world is presently plagued with unprecedented outbreaks of immorality and the dishonoring of the body. Like plagues rushing out of control, men have been given over to unimaginable wickedness. Some of the vices that have become common include bulimia (episodes of binge eating and

This is a matter worthy of much thought.

### EXCHANGING THE TRUTH FOR A LIE

The KJV reads, *“Who changed the truth of God into a lie.”* This is viewing the matter from a subjective viewpoint—what the people did. They did not change the truth itself, but their representation of it, for the truth is eternal, *“enduring to all generations”* (Psa 100:5).

The truth, as compelling as it is, was placed to the side in favor of a lie. Even though the creation testified to the eternal power and Deity of God, yet men

lusts of men, provoking them to go *“a whoring with their own inventions”* (Psa 106:39). How tragic to choose the lie!

### THE CREATOR IS BLESSED FOREVER

*“... the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.”* By saying the Creator *“is blessed for ever,”* the Spirit means that He alone is worthy of all worship and service. He only is to be honored, for He has made and upholds all things.

I have recently become acutely aware of how little honor is actually given to God. Although He is *“blessed for ever,”* men insist on speaking more of their works than of His. We learn from this text how serious it is to rob God of His glory, and become unthankful. In this passage the Spirit affirms that the outbreak of gross immorality is directly traceable to the failure of men to give God honor and thanksgiving.

**Could it be that the unthankfulness of this generation, and its refusal to give glory to God has provoked the Lord to deliver it over to the lusts of its heart? Has God overlooked the credit men give to science, medicine, human innovation, and even the devil himself?**

### FOR THIS REASON

*“For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections...”* This is now the second time we have read of God giving men up, or delivering them over, to something. Again, were it not for the *“goodness of God”* that leads men to repentance (Rom 2:4), this would have been the lot of all men.

Notice, God did not give them over to be controlled by *“vile affections”* because they were murderers like Cain, but because exchanged the glory of God for created things. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what was made rather than the Maker. How serious is that? *“For this reason God gave them up to vile passions.”*<sup>NKJV</sup>

We will now see what these *“vile passions”* produced. Keep in mind that what we are reading is not the mere denunciation of the sins mentioned. Rather, it is an explanation for why they arose, and why they accelerated. **It was the result of God’s judgment.**

purging), anorexia (excessive dieting and weight loss due to the fear of being fat), fornication (all forms of immorality), use of narcotics (from tobacco and alcohol to hard drugs), bestiality (immorality committed with animals), homosexuality, and suicide. All of these are in near-epidemic proportions, and especially among the young. Professed authorities on these subjects have been able to do little more than identify the symptoms and affects of the abuses.

Why have these things arisen? Could it be that the unthankfulness of this generation, and its refusal to give glory to God has provoked the Lord to deliver it over to the lusts of its heart? Has God overlooked the credit men give to science, medicine, human innovation, and even the devil himself? Perhaps what we are seeing is a forsaken generation, paying the penalty for thrusting God out of its life. There is a severe penalty to be paid for rejecting the righteousness of God.

chose mythology, science, astrology, nature, and other lies. They *“exchanged”* the liberating truth of God for the bondage-creating lie. And why did they do so? Because God gave them over to their depraved hearts. In so doing, they became spiritually stupid, and thus began their descent into the quagmire of iniquity.

They chose to worship and serve the created things rather than the Creator. If we think this is too far from the people of our time, ponder the ecological absurdities that men have embraced in our day. “Mother earth” and “mother nature” have been so exalted that people extend themselves to protect animals and atmosphere, while killing babies and abusing one another. That is the kind of affect *“a lie”* produces.

As soon as men embraced the lie, the glory of God faded from their view. Simultaneously, all of the powers of darkness were loosed to inflame the base

## THE VILENESS OF SODOMY

*“<sup>26b</sup> For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.<sup>27</sup> Likewise also the*

*men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing*

*what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.”* The modesty of

the Spirit in describing this situation is worthy of note. He speaks of reprehensible sins so as not to provoke the passions of the sinful nature. Yet, He speaks with enough clarity so as to remove any question concerning the “vileness” of the passions to which God consigned the unthankful.

The phrase “*natural use*” means instinctive intimacy between a man and a woman. Some of the more contemporary translations provide more crude language, unworthy of repeating here. The NASB reads “*natural function*,” while the NIV and RSV read “*natural relations*.”

The sin of reference is sodomy, which is consistently and powerfully condemned by God. The term men have assigned to this sin is homosexuality, which is more a term of man’s wisdom. The text declares the involvement of both women and men. Once again, an “*exchange*” is made—what is right for something that is wrong; the truth for a lie. The “*natural use*” is the one God ordained, and is the only means by which procreation can take place. The preference of sodomy was not merely “*unnatural*” (NRSV, NIV, NASB). The expression is much stronger than that. There are two words in the Greek text (παρὰ φύσιν). The first word means “adversatively, against, contrary to, without regard for, beyond.”<sup>»Barclay-Newman</sup>

The word “unnatural,” therefore, is too weak. The sin of sodomy conflicts with nature. It is contrary to it, and violates an order set in place by God Himself. Men have attempted to dignify the sin by calling woman-to-woman intimacy lesbianism. That makes it all more tolerable, and opens the door for the psychological analysts to ply their fleshly trade.

The Spirit continues on this matter, showing the extent to which “*vile passions*” carried their victims. “*Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful.*”<sup>»NKJV</sup> Remember, this is the Holy Spirit speaking. What men call love, the Spirit calls “*shameful*.” The burning lust of men for men is not something

acquired in birth. It is a result of failing to glory God and be thankful. It is the consequence of being delivered over to vile passions by the God they neglected.

#### Sodom and Gomorrah

You may recall that this is the very sin that brought “*the vengeance of eternal fire*” upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Because this is vehemently denied by sodomites, I

**The burning lust of men for men is not something acquired in birth. It is a result of failing to glory God and be thankful. It is the consequence of being delivered over to vile passions by the God they neglected.**

will take the time to briefly rehearse that awesome event.

The condition of Sodom and Gomorrah was so vile the sound of it reached up into heaven. “And the LORD said, ‘*The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave.*’” The nature of their sin was not explained at that point. Having sent two angels to destroy the city, the matter was made more clear. Appearing as men, these angels were entertained by Lot. After he prepared a great feast for them, and before they retired for the evening, the seriousness of the condition surfaced. “*Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter; and they called to Lot and said to him, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them.’*” After Lot rejected their request, the angels “*brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. And they struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great.*” But their passions burned still stronger, even after the men were blinded. It is written, “*they wearied themselves trying to find the doorway*” (Gen 19:4-11<sup>NASB</sup>). Here is a lust that refuses to be satisfied, driving men to unparalleled indulgence.

#### The Law

The Law, which was given to define sin (Rom 3:20), spoke directly to the matter of sodomy. “*You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination. Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is perversion*”<sup>NKJV</sup> (Lev 18:20). “*If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them*”<sup>NKJV</sup> (Lev 20:13). The texts are plain enough.

#### The Time of the Judges

The book of Judges contains an incident much like that occurring Sodom. The account describes an unnamed man of years. Returning from a day’s work, he saw a traveling man in the street of the city. The “*old man*” asked where he was from and where he was going. Upon learning the traveler was going to the house of God, and had no place to stay for the evening, he brought him to his own home. “*Peace be with you! However, let all your needs be my responsibility; only do not spend the night in the open square. So he brought him into his house, and gave fodder to the donkeys. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank.*”<sup>NKJV</sup> They then spent some enjoyable time together.

The pleasantries of the evening was soon interrupted. The Scriptures say, “*As they were enjoying themselves, suddenly certain men of the city, perverted men, surrounded the house and beat on the door. They spoke to the master of the house, the old man, saying, ‘Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him carnally!’*”<sup>NKJV</sup> (Judges 19:16-22). Notice, the text says they were “*perverted men*.” The KJV says they were “*sons of Belial*” (an exact translation). The NIV reads “*wicked men*.” The NASB reads, “*certain worthless fellows.*” The RSV reads “*base fellows.*” The NRSV reads “*a perverse lot.*”

The text is clear enough. These men were wicked, perverted, and base. Their condition was revealed in their preference for men—a condition that violates nature, law, and grace. It cannot be justified.

### The New Testament

In this day of salvation the announcement is made, “. . . the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites . . .” (1 Cor 6:9). The Law, it is affirmed, is for “the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy

thinking on the matter.

### CLARIFICATION

The purpose of our text is not merely to emphasize the extremely corrupt nature of this transgression. It IS a sin that violates nature, law, and grace. However, this text is explaining WHY the sin became dominant. It was because men so provoked God, he gave them over to base

**The purpose of our text is not merely to emphasize the extremely corrupt nature of this transgression. It IS a sin that violates nature, law, and grace. However, this text is explaining WHY the sin became dominant. It was because men so provoked God, he gave them over to base lusts, to fulfill them with zeal.**

and profane.”<sup>NKJV</sup> Listed in that category are “sodomites” (1 Tim 1:9-10).

### Contemporary Translations

If you are accustomed to reading one of the contemporary versions of Scripture (NKJV, NSRV, NIV, NASB), you are aware the word “sodomite” is not generally used in them. Alternate words are “perverted persons”<sup>(NKJV)</sup>, “male temple prostitutes”<sup>(NRSV)</sup>, “male shrine prostitutes”<sup>(NIV)</sup>, and “male cult prostitutes”<sup>(NASB, RSV)</sup>. These are employed in the Old Testament writings. What they fail to confirm is that a “male prostitute” was. In fact, a sodomite, or a man who was intimate with another man.

The exclusion of “sodomites” from the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9), appears to be more difficult to avoid. The KJV reads, “abusers of themselves with mankind,” thus emphasizing the deviate nature of the deed. The NKJV and NRSV read “sodomites.” The NIV reads “homosexual offenders.” The NASB reads “homosexuals.” The 1 Timothy 1:10 text reads much the same way. The KJV reads “them that defile themselves with mankind.” The RSV and NRSV read “sodomites.” The NASB reads “homosexuals.”

I have taken the time to explain this more fully because of the aggressive defense of sodomy that is being promoted in our day, and to which our children are subjected. Terms like “sexual orientation,” “sexual preference,” and others, are employed to break down the defenses even nature raises. But this sin is one of enormous magnitude. We must not allow Satan’s children to corrupt our

lusts, to fulfill them with zeal. Here is a sin that is the result of sin! It has arisen because men have refused to acknowledge, honor, and serve the Living God.

This particular transgression has reached new depths in our time. In history, it was associated with heathen religions. Sodomites did not identify themselves with Christ, but with the gods of sensuality and lust. In our time, however, there are sodomite churches and preachers. Traditional Christian denominations are now ordaining sodomites to the ministry, and we regularly hear of “gay Christians.” We are, indeed, living in a time of severe judgment, and we do well to give diligence to make our calling and election sure.

### A JUST PENALTY

The “indecent acts” committed by these people are immediately judged by God. They “received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.”<sup>NIV</sup> This is an unusually strong statement, being the only one of its kind in Scripture. Other translations read as follows: “received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.”<sup>NRSV</sup> . . . “receiving in themselves due reward for their perversion”<sup>NJB</sup> . . . “suffered within themselves the penalty they so richly deserved”<sup>NLT</sup> . . . “getting in their bodies the right reward of their evil-doing”<sup>BBE</sup> . . . “suffering in their own bodies and personalities the inevitable consequences and penalty of their wrong doing and going astray, which was [their] fitting retribution.”<sup>AMPLIFIED BIBLE</sup>

**Extraordinary sins do not result**

**in ordinary retribution!** This principle is included in the statement, “Some men’s sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later”<sup>NKJV</sup> (1 Tim 5:24). Some sin not only violates the written Law of God, but the unwritten law of nature. Such sins are especially foolish because they require the suppression of even natural understanding and inclinations. The sins of women exchanging “the natural use for what is against nature,” and men burning “in their lust for one another; men with men,” are such sins. They call for a more immediate penalty that makes the sinner more conspicuous: i.e., “receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet (appropriate)”.

Whether nations or individuals, those who have practiced such base sins have suffered unusual deterioration in both body and soul.

There is an impressive listing of “sexually transmitted diseases” (STD). Among them are AIDS (breakdown of the immune system, with no known cure), syphilis (highly infectious spread of lesions and deterioration effecting the skin, brain, and spinal chord), gonorrhea (inflammatory disease affecting personal parts, throat and eyes), Chlamydia (a disease that sometimes has no symptoms, and causes infertility in women), herpes (infectious disease related to cancer, which has no known cure), chancroid (an infection leaving a painful sore that often destroys tissue), etc.

Traditionally, these diseases have been found in epidemic proportions in the darker continents, noted for their religious corruption and idolatry. They are presently found in growing measures in our own country. While some innocent people have also suffered from these infectious diseases, they are the deserved “penalty” for extraordinary sin. They are a Divine judgment on a society that has rejected the knowledge of God.

### Our Reaction

Should we have compassion on such sinners? Indeed we should! The Gospel is addressed to even these people. A notable example of this is found in the Corinthian church. Corinth was a place where many of these things were regularly practiced. Although a citadel of human wisdom, that wisdom was not able to keep men from rejecting God and descending into a moral pit. Because there was a tendency to

ignore the seriousness of these sins, the Spirit issued a strong warning to the brethren there. *“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of*

*God.”* (1 Cor 6:9-10). In this text, the word translated “effeminate” (μαλακοί) means a man that is womanly, and even a young boy kept for relations with a man. The words “abusers of themselves with mankind” comes from ἀρσενικοῖται, and means sodomite, or homosexual.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> There is no chance that such people will inherit the kingdom of God. These are reprehensible sins—abominations.

After making this solemn pronouncement, the spirit adds, *“And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God”* (1 Cor 6:11). The righteousness of God, therefore, can also be conferred on those who have been guilty of such unreasonable sins, yet have believed the Gospel and fallen upon Jesus.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MEN REFUSE THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

*“<sup>28</sup>And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; <sup>29</sup>being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, <sup>30</sup>backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup>undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful . . .”*

The Spirit does not leave this subject quickly, or only touch upon it in a surface manner. He is establishing the absolute need for the righteousness of God. Men have no righteousness of their own, nor are they capable of producing one. When left to their own nature, they quickly descend into the bottomless pit of corruption. Apart from Divine restraint we are not able to know how profoundly wicked men would become.

We have just read of God turning men over to their own base lusts. Now He elaborates on that condition, firmly fixing in our hearts that this was a just judgment from God. It was not simply the sinful nature that carried men further into the abyss of iniquity, but God’s release of them to do so.

### THEY DID NOT LIKE TO RETAIN GOD IN THEIR KNOWLEDGE

*“Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God”*<sup>NIV</sup> God created man in

His own image, and placed him in a world that bore testimony to His “eternal power and Deity.” Additionally, the Lord deliberately assigned the times and places to be occupied by men “that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:26-27).

Every advantage was afforded to men in order that they might know God. If they would have followed their conscience,

**Men have no righteousness of their own, nor are they capable of producing one. When left to their own nature, they quickly descend into the bottomless pit of corruption. Apart from Divine restraint we are not able to know how profoundly wicked men would become.**

it would have led them to pursue the true knowledge of God. But they did not. What “may be known of God” was “manifest IN them, for God has shown it to them” (1:19). Yet, men “did not like to retain God in their knowledge.” They had no real appetite for the true God, and thus sought to develop their own.

### A Deliberate Response

The action here is deliberate, and not inadvertent. They turned away from God, seeing no advantage in pursuing Him. It was an act of rejection, and there was nothing casual about it. When referring to the ultimate light, Jesus put it this way. *“And this is the condemnation, that light*

*is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil”* (John 3:19).

The principle is the same, whether we are speaking of the light revealed through the creation, or the fullest light made known in Jesus. Men reject Divine light because they prefer darkness—sin and degradation. They prefer the darkness because it matches their deeds—it is where they feel more comfortable, and where they find their greatest satisfaction.

*“For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed”*<sup>NKJV</sup> (John 3:20).

This is another way of saying, “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it **is not** subject to the law of God, **neither indeed can be**” (Rom 8:7). And again, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for **they are foolishness** unto him: **neither can he know them,**

*because they are spiritually discerned”* (1 Cor 2:14). The condition, however, was produced by man’s own corrupt appetite. This is not the way God made man, but is the direct result of sin.

### A Description of Humanity

This passage is not a description of the baser segment of humanity, but of humanity as a whole. The emphasis is on the Gentiles, or those without a written Law from God. In the second chapter, the Spirit will show that the same principles apply to the Jews, who received a written Law from God.

The reference is to “men,” introduced



in verse 18, and elaborated on throughout the remainder of the chapter. There are some notables among our race who, before the Law, pursued God. Among them are Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Job. They are most unusual men, and were also noted for their acknowledgment of sin. The sacrifice of Christ was for them also, for they too needed a righteousness from God.

In my judgment, we must carefully guard against concluding only some men refused to retain God in their knowledge, or that this is something less than a universal blight. The Spirit is convincing us of the essentiality of a righteousness from God—one that is given to men. With Divine precision, He is showing the effects that sin has worked among men. It has so corrupted the human nature that nothing from it is salvageable. There is no remnant of the Adamic nature that can be reshaped or made acceptable to God. A new birth is absolutely essential! That is an postulate of Scripture that cannot be ignored. Jesus said that apart from the new birth, the kingdom of God could neither be perceived nor entered (John 3:3,5). Scripture affirms that being a Jew or a Gentile is not what counts, but “*a new creature*” (Gal 6:15).

I must acknowledge that it was some time before the magnitude of this truth began to burst upon my soul. At the time, however, that it became more apparent to me, it was because I was the more convinced of the exceeding sinfulness of sin (Rom 7:13). This is precisely what this text is affirming to our spirits. It is showing us that sin consistently and aggressively descends into the pit. It never reaches upward, and never encourages a quest for God—never!

Sin—of which all are guilty—moves men to thrust God from their thoughts, rejecting the obvious testimony of His creation. It causes men to prefer darkness and move swiftly away from God. Even though sinners are given great advantages, they cannot reverse their downward direction. They are incapable of yielding anything acceptable to God. They need a righteousness from God. And their condition confirms it.

The Spirit will again show us the seriousness of the human condition. He will confirm that although God has compassion, and “*is love*,” yet He will not ignore man’s refusal to retain Him in their knowledge, and their preference for their sin.

### One More Thing

One more word on this critical point. It is imperative that we see the

**With Divine precision, He is showing the effects that sin has worked among men. It has so corrupted the human nature that nothing from it is salvageable. There is no remnant of the Adamic nature that can be reshaped or made acceptable to God.**

seriousness of men’s disinterest in God. That should be glaringly apparent in this text. And yet, in confirmation of the wickedness of the times, this very attitude has entered into the professed church.

There is a staggering amount of disinterest in God and the things of God in the churches. More and more they are being given over to social issues, community projects, and the resolution of human difficulties. The proclamation of God’s word is not held in high regard, and the length and frequency of gatherings devoted to the things of God are being reduced to a bare minimum.

Who has not witnessed this remarkable phenomenon? And yet it is ignored to such a degree as causes the heart to tremble. This climate of disinterest has brought about a flood of unspiritual leaders, charlatans, and religious opportunists. Men of earthly expertise have supplanted those with the knowledge of God. Seminars and workshops majoring on trivia have become popular. Christian conventions are led by motivators, church-builders, administrators, and carnal specialists.

The quest of the modern church is not

for the Lord, but for success and earthly recognition. Its leaders receive their credentials from institutions rather than the Lord, and become specialists in things that will pass away. They are leading men and women in ignoring God. What they are calling successful does not have one ounce of support from the Word of God. In fact, it is diametrically opposed to everything Jesus and the Apostles taught. No longer is God unknown only among the heathen tribes of the world, or the philosophical citadels of an Athens or Corinth. Now He is unknown in the church. This is a shameful condition, as confirmed by this word to the church of God in Corinth, “*Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame*”<sup>NIV</sup> (1 Cor 15:34).

### Is This Germane?

Is this observation germane, or relevant, to the exposition of this text? Some might consider it to be a needless tirade. However, this is precisely the point of our text. This is being addressed to the people of God—the explanation for the universal descent of humanity into the quagmire of sin. The condition is traced back to men’s refusal to retain God in their knowledge. Is there anyone of sound mind that imagines God will be more tolerant of such a refusal among the professed church than He was among those lacking such an abundance of revelation? When men refuse to pursue and think upon God, regardless of their profession, they are on the precipice of Divine judgment, if not at its very center.

### GOD GAVE THEM OVER

“*God gave them over to a reprobate mind*,” or “*a debased mind*,”<sup>NKJV</sup>, or “*to a depraved mind*.”<sup>NIV,NASB</sup> A “*reprobate mind*” is one that is rejected and unacceptable in every way. The word translated “*reprobate*” is *ἀδόκιμον*, and means “failing to meet the test, disqualified, worthless, and corrupted. This is a mind totally rejected by God.

Man already possessed this kind of mind because of sin. In His mercy, however, God had restrained men from the full impact of that mind. But now, because men had refused to retain God in their knowledge, and to confirm the utter



depravity of the fallen mind, God delivers men over to it, removing all restraints.

Let those who insist on elevating the human mind and the disciplines related to it, ponder this. **Apart from the sanctifying influence of the knowledge of God, the mind of man is depraved, rejected, and worthless. God will receive nothing from it.** This is precisely why we are born again, that we might be “renewed in the spirit of our mind” (Eph 4:23). Only then can the Law of God be served with our “mind” (Rom 7:25). In the state of nature, we are described as “alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works” (Col 1:21). That very mind kept us enslaved to sin, thereby constituting us “unrighteous” in every sense of the word.

### Something to be Pondered

Those who neglect their souls, refusing to hear the Gospel and not devoting themselves to seeking the Lord and His righteousness, must ponder this. They have overestimated the strength of the human mind and will. Countless people live in the imagination that they can turn their steps toward God whenever they want. Thus they choose to enjoy “the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb 11:25), thinking they can change their minds whenever they desire. However, they have not considered that God can deliver them over to the power of the depraved mind, causing a rapid and irrecoverable moral downfall. If this is not possible, then our text has no truth in it.

Among other things, this confirms men are controlled by what they think, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he”<sup>NKJV</sup> (Prov 23:7). Further, as we will see, to be delivered over to a “reprobate mind” locks one into iniquitous conduct.

### THINGS WHICH ARE NOT FITTING

The result of being handed over to the domination of “a reprobate mind” is thus stated: “to do those things which are not fitting.”<sup>NKJV</sup> Other versions say “things that should not be done,”<sup>NRSV</sup> “to do what ought not to be done.”<sup>NIV</sup> These are things disgraceful and shameful, unbefitting for those created in the image of God. Such things are in conflict with God and contrary to the Divine image man bears.

The Spirit has already mentioned the

reprehensible sin of sodomy. That sin, however, is the depths of sin—the extent to which human depravity can express itself. Sodomites, however, were not the only ones delivered over to their corrupt minds. We are now introduced to a most impressive list of transgressions. They are all the result of Divine abandonment—of being delivered over to a “reprobate mind.” Apart from the righteousness that comes from God, this is what the human nature produces.

### FILLED WITH ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS

“Being filled with all unrighteousness.” Other versions read, “filled with every kind of wickedness,”<sup>NRSV</sup> “filled with every kind of wickedness,”<sup>NIV</sup> “filled with all manner of wickedness.”<sup>NRSV</sup> As soon as God gave men over to a “reprobate mind,” iniquity rushed in like a mighty tidal wave. **It confirmed what sin had done to the spirit of man.** It was not the mind of the devil to which men were consigned, but to their own mind! Notice the extent of sin’s expression in men: “filled,” “all unrighteousness.” That is, every part of their persons was affected, and every kind of sin was indulged. Rarely is such an extensive list of iniquity provided—and it is all because God gave men over to their own depraved minds. And, He did so because they refused to retain Him in their knowledge.

### Unrighteousness

The general heading of these expressions is “unrighteousness”—the exact opposite of “the righteousness of God.” By **nature** unrighteousness is wrong—totally wrong. Legally, it is the violation of both the Nature and Law of God. All who are “unrighteous,” without exception, are excluded from the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9). They are not and cannot be excepted by God.

Our text has stated, “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (1:18).

You must not fail to see the magnitude of the situation. Unrighteousness disqualifies one from Divine acceptance. As if that were not enough, it also suppresses the truth whereby men are made aware of the righteousness that

comes from God. Once this truth is perceived with any degree of clarity, men will be eager to give the total credit for salvation to the Lord and His Christ.

There is no need to comment further about the condition of those “filled with all unrighteousness.” It is a dreadful condition requiring the initiative of God.

**FORNICATION.** From πορνεία, por-ne-a, from which the word “pornography” is derived. This is a general word denoting all forms of immoralities. It includes illicit intimacy of any sort: adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, and incest.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> With all disregard for God and His will, this sin drives one to satisfy the lower appetites of the human nature. It is particularly reprehensible. Fornication, unless repented of and abandoned, excludes one from heaven. Scriptures against fornication include 1 Cor 6:13; 10:8; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5.

**WICKEDNESS.** From πονηρία, pon-ay-ree-ah. This means intentionally practiced evil of all sorts. It is driven by evil purposes and desires.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> This is nothing less than the erupting of a degenerate nature. There is no evil that does not appear enticing to those practicing wickedness. Scriptures on wickedness include Luke 11:39; Acts 8:32; 1 Cor 5:8 and 1 John 5:19.



### COVETOUSNESS.

From πλεονεξία, pleo-nexia. This means a disposition to have more than one’s share, avarice, or greed.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> Covetousness is called “idolatry” in Colossians 3:5, and is something with which we must contend. It comes from a fundamental dissatisfaction with what the Lord has given us. Scriptures on covetousness include Lk 12:15; Eph 5:3; Heb 13:5.

**MALICIOUSNESS.** From κακία, kak-ia. This means hateful feelings toward another, dislike, and ill-will.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> The malicious person seeks to harm others in whatever way possible. Hatred dominates the heart to such an extent

that delight is taken at the pain of others. Scriptures on malice include 1 Cor 5:8; 14:20; Eph 4:31; Col 3:8.

**FULL OF ENVY.** From φθόνου, phthonou, meaning envy, or jealousy over the good success of another.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> Notice they are said to be FULL of envy, so that it dominates all they do and say. Envy causes a person to view everyone as a personal competitor. The success or blessing of another person is taken as an insult, and something of which the one that is envious is more worthy. Scriptures on envy include 1 Cor 13:4; 1 Pet 2:1.

**MURDER.** From φόνου, phonou, meaning murder, slaughter, or killing: violently and deliberately taking the life of another.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> Because of a fundamental disrespect for God Himself, the murderer seeks to take the life of another without a twinge of conscience. Like Cain, the murderer thinks he gains some sort of advantage by killing. Scriptures on murder include 1 Pet 4:15; 1 John 3:15; Rev 21:8

**DEBATE.** From ἔριδος, eri-dos. This means strife, contention, variance, discord, quarrels, and rivalries.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> The debater agitates the social waters, causing disruption and argument wherever he goes. He is not content until there is contention, with persons competing needlessly against another. This is the opposite of unity. Scriptures on debate include 2 Cor 12:20.

**DECEIT.** From δόλου, do-lou. This means treachery, fraud, to bait by misrepresentation.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> Here advantage is sought by deception. Scriptures on deceit include Mk 7:22; Rom 3:13; Col 2:8.

**MALIGNITY.** From κακοηθείας, kako-eth-ei-as, meaning meanness, spitefulness, a disposition to produce wickedness.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> A malignant person is like a walking time bomb. Wherever they are, trouble is apt to break forth like a plague. They are chief ministers of Satan. Scriptures on malignity include Romans 1:29.

**WHISPERERS.** From ψιθυριστάς, psithur-is-tas, meaning one who bears harmful

gossip against another, gossiper, talebearer, secret slanderer.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> The whisperer seeks to gain honor at the expense of another, spreading rumors, and defaming the name of others. Scriptures on whisperers include 2 Cor 12:20.

**BACKBITERS.** From καταλάλους, katalalous. This means one who speaks evil of another, evil speaking, and spreading evil reports.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> Like the whisperer, the backbiter does his work secretly. He raises evil reports, causing others to view his

**Envy causes a person to view everyone as a personal competitor. The success or blessing of another person is taken as an insult, and something of which the one that is envious is more worthy.**

target with disdain. Scriptures on backbiting include 2 Cor 12:20.

**HATERS OF GOD.** From θεοστυγείς, theos-tug-eis, meaning hating God, or hateful toward God.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> The hater of God thinks nothing of ignoring God, disobeying Him, or even become angry with Him or disagreeing with Him. He had rather justify himself than the God who will judge him. Wherever God is represented, whether in His Word of in His people, this person lashes out against the representation. Scriptures on hating God include Ex 20:5; Matt 6:24; John 7:7

**DESPITEFUL.** From ὕβριστάς, ubris-tas. This means injurious to others, insolent, puffed up with pride and heaping insulting language upon others, a violent aggressor, one with a superior attitude mistreating others.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> Not only does the spiteful person have evil desires and pride, but he is aggressive to throw it like acid upon others. Scriptures on spitefulness include Ezek 36:5; Matt 5:44; Acts 14:5.

**PROUD.** From ὑπερηφάνους, uper-ath-anous, meaning arrogant, haughty, an

empty boaster who brags of his position.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> The proud have nothing of which to boast, so speak about themselves in glowing and haughty words. Scriptures on the proud include Psa 40:4; Prov 15:25; James 4:6.

**BOASTERS.** From ἀλαζόνας, alaz-onas. This means arrogant boaster, braggart, show-off.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> This person loves to draw attention to himself. He wants the spotlight. Scriptures on boasters include 2 Tim 3:2; Psa 10:3; James 3:5.

**INVENTORS OF EVIL THINGS.** From ἐφευρέτας κακῶν, eph-eur-e-tas kak-on. This means one who schemes or plans things that are injurious or harmful, one who thinks up ways of doing evil.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> Instead of using his God-given abilities to glorify God, this person finds new ways to sin and promote sin. Scriptures on evil inventions include Amos 6:5; Psa 99:8; 106:39; Eccl 7:29.

**DISOBEDIENT TO PARENTS.** This comes from γονεύσιν ἀπειθεῖς, gon-eu-sin ap-ei-theis, meaning to parents, disobedient or rebellious, one who is not persuaded to obey his parents.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> Here are children that are obstinate, and unwilling to yield to the parents God has placed over them. They will not give heed to their parent's will or counsel. Scriptures on disobedience to parents include Deut 21:18; 2 Tim 3:2.

**WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING.** From ἀσυνέτους, asu-ne-tous, meaning without understanding, dull, senseless, foolish, unintelligent.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> These blunder into pits of destruction because they are blind. They reason wrongly because they cannot see. Concerning the real facts and issues of life, they are stupid. Scriptures on having no understanding include Psa 32:9; 49:20; Isa 27:11.

**COVENANTBREAKERS.** From ἀσυνθέτους, asun-thet-ous. This means faithless, disloyal, covenant-breaking, not keeping a promise, untrustworthy, treacherous.<sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> This person's word is worthless. He only makes a promise in order to gain a personal advantage. He thinks nothing of throwing the promise away when it no longer is seen as self-promoting. Scriptures on breaking

covenant include Isa 33:8; 2 Tim 3:3.

### WITHOUT NATURAL AFFECTION.

From ἀστόργους, as-tor-gous, meaning lacking normal human affection, devoid of natural affection, unloving, heartless. Barclay-Newman

Sin has so hardened this person that he crawls beneath the fence of nature. There is no heart in the person's life, as he is totally wrapped up in himself. Scriptures on the lack of natural affection

**UNMERCIFUL.** From ἀνελεήμονας, anele-a-mon-as. This means without compassion, pitiless. Barclay-Newman

Those in sore need are viewed as worthless in this person's eyes. He only thinks of what he can receive, and never of what he can give. Scriptures on unmerciful include James 2:13; Prov 21:13.

### ALL SELF CENTERED

Notice that all of these sins are self

*trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ*<sup>NASB</sup> (Gal 1:10). This approach has built many a megachurch, but it has never, and can never, please God. Such men are purveyors of flesh, and are to be given no honor.

### ALL UNLIKE GOD

You will also note that these transgressions are totally unlike the God whose image we bear. That is the essence of sin: un-God-likeness.

Men, when left to themselves, will become more and more unlike God. Their thoughts, words, and deeds, will confirm that is the case. Sin has set degeneracy in motion, and only the grace of God and the gift of righteousness can arrest it.

**When men pushed God into the background, they became "filled with unrighteousness," as it pervaded every aspect of their beings. Men cannot be good or right in any sense, where they refuse to retain God in their knowledge.**

include 2 Tim 3:3.

**IMPLACABLE.** From ἀσπόνδους, as-pon-dous, meaning irreconcilable. Barclay-Newman

Here is a person who cannot be tamed or toned down. His fierceness increases when attempts are made to be peaceable. Scriptures on implacable include Rom 1:31; Hosea 7:11. An implacable person is more beastly than manly.

centered. That is what sin does—it moves the individual to the center of all his considerations. There is therefore no room left for God or the things of God.

This is the reason a religion that caters to the self interests of men will not be blessed by God. *"For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still*

### MAN NEEDS A RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD

The Spirit has shown us the need of a righteousness from God, and has done so with great power. When men pushed God into the background, they became "filled with unrighteousness," as it pervaded every aspect of their beings. Men cannot be good or right in any sense, where they refuse to retain God in their knowledge. That is an inviolable principle.

## WHEN MEN ARE DESERVING OF DEATH

<sup>82</sup> . . . *who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.*" How desperately this truth must be grasped. There is a marked tendency within the professed church to excuse those who do not know God. "How can they know to do any better," some vainly reason, "seeing they have never heard the truth about God?" To the sophist, this may appear to be sound reasoning, but it is not. It is believing in Jesus Christ that is said to require hearing (Rom 10:14-17), not pursuing God or living within an awareness of Him. There, faith is the issue. In our text it is not. The issue in our text is the refusal to proceed on the basis of the rudimentary knowledge of God that was available to man. It is that men refused to "retain God in their knowledge," however inferior men

may think that knowledge to be.

Now the Spirit affirms men actually possess more knowledge of God than they are disposed to admit. The NRSV reads, *"They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die."* The NIV reads, *"Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death."* We are speaking of a world "without excuse" (Rom 1:20), and we do well to avoid trying to give it one. No purpose is served by alibiing for sin.

How is it that men knew *"the righteous judgment of God, that those do such things are worthy of death?"* We are not speaking of those subjected to the testimony of the Gospel, or even to the Law, but to that of nature. Yet, such are said to have known of God's righteous judgment, that those doing such things are deserving of death.

There is, as confirmed by Romans 2:14-15, a lingering consciousness of God and His ways that defies human explanation. *"For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another."* That knowledge, however inferior it may be to the knowledge of God experienced in Christ Jesus, rendered all sin inexcusable, particularly the eagerness to commit it. The epitaph over the entirety of humanity is, "without excuse!"

It appears this knowledge was intuitive, part of the Divine imagery in man. It was so strong that considerable effort was required to subdue it. That this is true can be seen in the human

propensity to moral law, even in crude and undeveloped societies.

But there is more to this matter than that. God brought three severe judgments upon men prior to the Law.

#### Adam and Eve

The first of these judgments took place in Eden. In it, the parents of the human race were consigned to death because of disobedience (Gen 2:17; 3:24). The notion that they kept this a secret is too absurd to even consider. The activities of their first two sons bore witness to their obvious testimony of the cause of death, and the need for sacrifice.

Adam lived nine hundred and thirty years—nearly a millennium. Because the entire race sprang from him (Gen 3:20; Acts 17:26), this knowledge was no doubt passed along among men. Humanity knew about God's judgment, and for nine hundred and thirty years, had a walking testimony to that fact among them. Adam lived well past the births of Enoch and Methuselah, and Lamech. He also lived more than 500 years after (2970 B.C.) the beginning of Sumerian civilization (3500 B.C.). The knowledge of the judgment in Eden must have been considerable.

#### The Flood

Then there was the flood—another Divine judgment resulting in unprecedented death. Noah lived well into the lifetime of Terah, Abraham's father. The Egyptian, Babylonian, and Hititte empires were also formed in his lifetime. Word of the flood penetrated into multiple civilizations as the experience of Divine judgment was reported.

The three sons of Noah, who all went through the flood, were the ones through whom the whole earth was populated. It should be obvious that they did not forget the time of cursing they endured. *"Now the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated"*<sup>NKJV</sup> (Gen 9:19). Commensurate with the spreading of the population came also the recollection of the flood. Nearly every civilization has some record of a flood.

#### Sodom and Gomorrah

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah occurred around 1868 B.C. Not long after that, major civilizations developed, including Europe and Britain (1800) and dynasties in China (1766). The knowledge of that destruction was doubtless conveyed among them.

Thus, purely from an academic viewpoint, we can see the possibility of rather extensive knowledge about the judgment of God. Add to that the plagues of Egypt (1480), and it becomes apparent mankind could not plead ignorance

**The point of this text, is that they were incapable of saving themselves, and unworthy of a salvation from God. It is His mercy that will provide that remarkable salvation.**

concerning the judgment of God.

All of these judgments confirm that transgressors are *"worthy of death."* By suppressing the truth given to them, and indulging their sinful appetites without restraint, they forfeited their right to live—and they knew it. However, they chose to suppress that knowledge.

Mark it well, those who refuse to retain God in their knowledge really have NO right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," politics notwithstanding.

However, in His infinite mercy, God has provided a way to extricate men from their dilemma. The point of this text, is that they were incapable of saving themselves, and unworthy of a salvation from God. It is His mercy that will provide that remarkable salvation.

#### APPROVAL OF WICKED PRACTICES

The wickedness of the human heart is further evidenced by the things men approve. Even though they knew God's judgment was against such things, *"they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them."*<sup>NASB</sup> The NRSV reads, *"but even applaud*

*others who practice them."* Wicked men can be applauded by putting them into influential offices. They can also be approved by patronizing the corrupt music and entertainment they produce.

Here we behold the corrupting nature of sin. Rather than fallen men enjoying their Creator, whose image they bear, they take delight in others who break His law and contradict His nature. In so doing, their conscience is salved, but their condemnation becomes more sure.

This very principle was announced by James to those in Christ, warning them of the consequences of preferring and giving honor to the enemies of God. *"Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God"* (James 4:4). **You cannot "approve" those who sin against God and still remain in His favor.** The word of Jehu to king Jehosaphat is certainly appropriate here. *"Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Therefore the wrath of the LORD is upon you"*<sup>NKJV</sup> (2 Chron 19:2).

Thus all men are found richly deserving of God's wrath. Like the prodigal, they have squandered their resources. Now they stand stripped of every vestige of righteousness and stand powerless and helpless before the Lord. They need a righteousness from God, for they have none of their own, nor are they capable of producing one.

Man must be aware of this natural condition before the salvation of God obtains any benefit, or is even seen as necessary. When the Law was given, it accentuated the realities declared in our text, *"so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful"*<sup>NKJV</sup> (Rom 7:13). When faith perceives this, the revelation of a righteousness from God becomes *"the joyful sound"* (Psa 89:15). The feet of those bearing the Gospel then become beautiful, as men begin to pant for the living waters that flow from the Gospel of Christ.

But take this knowledge away—the

knowledge of the awfulness of sin—and neither the Gospel nor the righteousness of God will be seen as indispensable. Men will thus think nothing of shelving the

Gospel in interest of things they deem more important and relevant. Unless that view is abandoned in favor of the truth, it will become the occasion for Divine

judgment and ultimate condemnation. Men do need a righteousness, and it can only come from God! You cannot get more serious than that!

---

## CONCLUSION

---

I must again state the Divine purpose for this extensive condemnation of sin. We may be tempted to left our vision rest upon the sins rather than upon the point that is being made. The Spirit is establishing our need for a righteousness from God. That righteousness is appropriately called the “*gift of righteousness*” (Rom 5:17). It is not the recognition of the goodness of man, but a ferment that recognizes the total absence of goodness within man.

There is no salvation apart from this

righteousness, but only condemnation. That is the stern reality of the case. Thus it is written, “*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*”<sup>NKJV</sup> (2 Cor 5:21). Making you the righteousness of God is just as necessary as making Jesus to be sin for you. Salvation cannot exclude either one. Further neither of them could have occurred without God. He is the One who “*made*” Jesus “*to be sin.*” He is also the One who made you become “*the righteousness of God in Him.*”

The only real input we have had in this matter is our sin. It was our sin that was placed upon Christ. That included all of our best efforts and works, all of which were “*filthy rags.*”

### SOMETHING GREATER

Our text has dealt with the world, but there is a principle to be seen here that must not be overlooked. If God was so harsh with the world for rejecting the testimony of nature, what will be His reaction to those who reject His Son, and the record He has given of Him?

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 3/10/2000. Continuing in our studies on Romans, we will cover 2:1-16: “**GOD’S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT.**” It will also be affirmed that unrighteousness suppresses the truth, making it more difficult for it to be apprehended. The Spirit will confirm that sin, while deeply imbedded in the fallen human nature, is still inexcusable. It cannot be overlooked, but requires a satisfying atonement. Further, God has remained impeccably righteous in His judgments against sin, and the requirement for an atonement. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God.

*The Blakely Family: Given, June, Benjamin, Jonathan, and Eva*

*406 South Sergeant Street, Joplin, MO 64801*

Telephone: (417) 782-3063, Email: Given (GivenB@aol.com) June: (JuneE01@aol.com)

Benjamin (Bensvison@aol.com), Jonathan (Jonstalk@aol.com), Eva

(Evablakely@aol.com)

Adah Hutchcraft (jahutch@myway.com)