

# The Consequences of Rejecting God

[Brian Schwertley](#)

## Introduction

In Romans 1:18 and following Paul begins a discussion of the wrath of God against wicked men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. The apostle proves that all men are without excuse because they suppress the truth about the living God revealed unto them. In verse 21 and following Paul will further explain verses 18 through 20. The connection between the suppression of the knowledge of God, ungodliness and unrighteousness and God's wrath will receive clarification and amplification. In verse 21 to 31 Paul will show that the suppression of the knowledge of God involves replacement. Instead of glorifying God they became futile in their thoughts (v. 21). They exchanged the glory of God for idols (v. 23); the truth of God for the lie (v. 25); the knowledge of God for a debased mind (v. 28). In rejecting God, wisdom is replaced with foolishness and true worship and service with rank idolatry. Man is a religious being who cannot exist in a vacuum. His rejection of God involves a turning toward foolishness and idolatry. Those people who reject God are epistemologically, ethically and religiously bankrupt.

Paul not only describes the manner in which people suppress the truth about God but also the consequences. Three times Paul makes a direct connection between the rejection of God and God's retribution against those who reject the truth: "Therefore, God also gave them up to uncleanness" (v. 24); "For this reason God gave them up to vile passions" (v. 26); "God gave them over to a debased mind to do those things which are not fitting" (v. 28). "In Paul's exposition of the outworking of the wrath of God, he develops the same logical process of deterioration, according to the principle he has established in verses 18-20. That is, the general pattern of his argument recurs in verses 21-24, 25-27 and 28-31 repeated with horrifying emphasis."<sup>1</sup> The climax to Paul's argumentation comes in verse 32 where he says that those who practice such things are worthy of death. All men are guilty and deserve God's sentence of condemnation against them.

As we study this section of Scripture we will consider the following: (1) the foolishness of man; (2) the idolatry of man; and (3) the judgment upon man. All of these things are intimately connected in Paul's argument. An understanding of these things will reveal man's dire predicament apart from Christ.

## The Foolishness of Man

Paul teaches that all men have knowledge of the true God and because of this knowledge they should glorify God. That is, they ought to render to God the honor that He deserves because of who He is. Also, all men should thank Him for all the benefits of

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<sup>1</sup> John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1994), 75.

this life, even our very existence, which all come from Him. The apostle teaches that everyone has a moral obligation to worship and serve the living and true God who exists. But what do men do? They reject God. They turn away from Him and create idols: false worldviews, erroneous philosophies and satanic religions. What is involved in this rejection of God? It involves a darkening of the heart of man. Paul will use different terms and expressions to describe the corruption of the human mind: “Their foolish hearts were darkened” (v. 21); “they became fools” (v. 22), “they became futile in their thoughts” (v. 21); and “God gave them over to a debased mind” (v. 28).

Paul teaches that idolatry and all sin begins in the human heart or mind. An examination of the words and phrases related to this corruption will help us understand unsaved man’s hostility toward God and his self-imposed blindness to reality.

(1) The apostle says that men became “futile in their thoughts.” The word (Gk. *Emaraiiothesan*) translated “vain” (KJV), “futile” (NKJV, NASB) or “futility” (NEB) has the sense of empty, useless, pointless. There is no true or useful content to autonomous human reasoning. It is a complete waste of time. In Scripture the word has a very negative connotation and refers to people, things or thoughts that are both foolish and wicked. The idols of the heathen are called vanities. Peter refers to “aimless conduct” (1 Pet. 1:18) which in context means unbiblical-corrupt conduct. Paul speaks of Gentiles who “walk, in the futility of their mind” (Eph. 4:17). That is, they are living in accordance with their blind and corrupt minds.

The word “thoughts”<sup>2</sup> (*dialogismois*) translated as “thinking” (RSV, NIV), “imagination” (KJV), “speculations” (NASB), “reasonings” (YLTB,<sup>3</sup> Lenski) and “argumentations” (J. B. Phillips) refers to the thoughts or thinking in man’s mind. Although the word is neutral in itself, here it is modified by the word “futile” and refers to evil, useless thoughts (i.e. thoughts that are made independently of God and revelation). The word is almost always used in a negative sense in the New Testament.

(2) Paul says that “their foolish hearts were darkened” (v. 21). The word “heart” (Gk. *kardia*) is the most comprehensive term for all our faculties whether feeling (Rom. 9:2), will (1 Cor. 4:5), intellect (Rom. 5:5).<sup>4</sup> We should not confuse the term with its modern usage which focuses on the emotions. When Paul uses this term he identifies everything that makes man human. Therefore, when the apostle says that their hearts are darkened, he means that every aspect of man is darkened.

The word darkened (Gk. *eokotisthe*) is a rich term in Scripture and refers to more than blindness in this passage. In rejecting God, men have become blind or without knowledge of the truth and they have become corrupt, evil and depraved. The Bible connects man’s lack of knowledge of spiritual truth with the state of his heart and his ethical corruption. “And this is the condemnation that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (Jn. 3:19). When men reject God they not only suppress the truth concerning God and embrace idols, they

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<sup>2</sup> NKJV

<sup>3</sup> Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible.

<sup>4</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1931), 329. “In the ancient world the emotions tended to be located lower down in the bowels...the heart stood for the entire inner life, in some contexts the emotions are more prominent (e.g. 2 Cor. 6:11-12), in some the intellectual (Rom. 10:8), and in some the volitional (1 Cor. 7:37). The heart is the center of the inner life; from it the person direction is determined, his whole course is shaped...” Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 85).

also embrace autonomous ethics and make themselves the judge of what is right and wrong. They commit evil and call it good.

(3) The apostle identifies those who reject God as fools. They have “foolish hearts” (v. 21); “professing to be wise, they become fools” (v. 22). It is ironic that unbelievers think they are wise. They appeal to science, philosophy and human wisdom in their rejection of God. But in reality they are fools. Their theories, false religions, philosophies and viewpoints by which they reject God are utterly absurd, irrational and untenable. Yet in their flight from God and truth they proudly embrace nonsense.

The Greek verb *emoranthesan* translated “became fools” (from *moros*, a fool) has an ethical connotation. Hodge writes, “We find throughout the Scriptures the idea of foolishness and sin, of wisdom and piety, intimately connected. In the language of the Bible, a fool is an impious man; the wise are the pious, those who fear God; foolishness is sin; understanding is [true] religion. The folly and darkness of which the apostle here speaks are therefore expressive of want of divine knowledge, which is both the effect and cause of moral depravity.”<sup>5</sup> Once again, we find a biblical connection between knowledge and ethics. According to Scripture unbelievers are engaged in both intellectual and moral folly. The two go hand in hand. Thus, the Psalmist says, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Ps. 14:1). On the flip side Solomon says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Pr. 1:7).

Because every created fact points to the true God, unbelievers must embrace the absurd or the ridiculous in order to suppress the truth. All their claims to wisdom are willful rejections of the truth in favor of the lie. All their theories are gross idols from their corrupt imagination. “[H]aving forsaken the truth of God, they turned to the vanity of their own reason, all the acuteness of which is fading and passes away like vapor. And thus their foolish mind, being involved in darkness, could understand nothing aright, but was carried away headlong, in various ways, into errors and delusions.”<sup>6</sup>

(4) In verse 28 Paul says, “God gave them over to a debased mind.” The Greek phrase “*adokimon roun*” is not easily reproduced in English and is translated in a number of different ways: depraved mind (NASB, NIV, John Stott), reprobate mind (KJV), base mind (RSV), depraved reason (NEB), worthless disposition (William Hendriksen), disapproved mind (YLTB), “a mind void of discernment” (F. L. Godet). The Greek word translated “debased” can be translated “disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:27; 2 Cor. 13:5; Tit. 1:16; the old KJV “reprobate”), “disapproved” (2 Tim. 3:8), “rejected” (Heb. 6:8). Paul is describing a mind that has failed the test by rejecting God and thus in turn is rejected or disapproved by God. The word reprobate best conveys the meaning in context because Paul is describing a mind that is rejected by God and abandoned or given over to its own depravity. “A reprobate mind is therefore not fit for any activity worthy of approbation or esteem.”<sup>7</sup> “Because they have rejected God as not worth reckoning with, God has delivered them into a condition in which their minds are fit only to be rejected as worthless, useless for their proper purpose, disreputable.”<sup>8</sup> Such a mind is thoroughly corrupt and is capable only of corrupt thought and depraved behavior.

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1972 [1835]), 39.

<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 72-73.

<sup>7</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 1:49.

<sup>8</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 1:128.

In establishing the guilt of mankind Paul shows that man is not only guilty of sin but also is thoroughly sinful. Man is sinful and wicked. Regarding the darkened heart of man the apostle teaches the following.

First, the depraved state of man's heart is a result of a willful act of rebellion. Men suffer under a self-imposed darkness. Men are haters of God (v. 30) from birth. Although we inherit our sinful nature from Adam, we are all personally responsible for the state of our heart and our personal rejection of God. "Sinfulness...describes unregenerate man's rebellious nature....Everything that unregenerate man does or thinks is undergirded by rebellious inclinations against God, or motivations that are sinful."<sup>9</sup>

Second, the darkness of man's heart is a result of a judicial act of God. Three times we are told that "God gave them up" (vv. 24, 26, 28), or more literally "God gave them over." Some commentators believe that the giving them up is not a positive act on the part of God but simply means that He stops restraining them and leaves them to their own devices (e.g. Robert Haldane). Others even speak of this process of degradation as a natural process of cause and effect. In other words, God chooses not to interfere with their rebellion and its natural consequences. While it is important to preserve the truth that God is not the author of sin, we do not do justice to this section of Scripture by saying this abandonment is by a bare permission on the part of God. Hodge notes, that such an idea "removes no real difficulty. If God permits those who forsake him to sink into vice, he does it intelligently and intentionally. The language of the apostle, as well as the analogy of Scripture demands more than this. It is at least a judicial abandonment. It is as a punishment for their apostasy that God gives men up to the power of sin....He withdraws from the wicked the restraints of His providence and grace, and gives them over to the dominion of sin....What happens as consequences does not come by chance, but as designed; and the sequence is secured by His control."<sup>10</sup> The punishment for sin is enslavement to the power of sin and eternal death.

Third, man's blindness and corruption extends to every aspect of his being. "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). "The imagination of a man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Mt. 15:19).

In the early chapters of Romans Paul is not only establishing the fact that all men are sinners and guilty before God, he also is teaching man's slavery to the power of sin. Men are not only guilty before God and deserving of death, they are also in a position of utter hopelessness. They do not have the power, strength or inner ability to repent, turn over a new leaf and start obeying God's law. Man's only hope is to look to Jesus Christ who saves from the guilt and *the power of sin*. To everyone who rejects man's depravity we ask one simple question: "Can you go even one single day without committing sin?" "Can you stop your own mind from ever thinking impure thoughts?" The answer to these questions is obvious.

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<sup>9</sup> Leonard J. Coppes, *Are Five Points Enough? The Ten Points of Calvinism* (Manassas, VA: Reformation Education Foundation, 1980), 44.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Hodge, *Romans*, 40.

Fourth, the state of man's heart explains the utter foolishness and idiocy that we find throughout the world. After discussing man's rejection of God and the darkness of man's heart, Paul describes man's idolatry and immorality.

## The Idolatry of Man

Thus far in Paul's argumentation we have noted that: (a) all men are continually suppressing the truth about God. (b) They refuse to honor God as God and give Him the worship and service that He deserves. (c) As a result they have darkened, reprobate hearts that hate God and are enslaved to sin. The depraved state of man's heart is a result of a judicial act of God.

In order to expand his teaching on the sinful, depraved condition of mankind Paul will elaborate further on man's degenerate state and the religious and ethical perversions in which it resulted. The apostle first deals with idolatry which is both an act of suppression and a result of suppression and then turns his attention to immorality. There are a number of things to note about idolatry in connection with the suppression of the knowledge of the true God.

(1) Because of man's nature (as an inherently religious being), when God is rejected substitutes are created to fill the void. All worldviews and philosophical systems that are not Christian are at bottom religious faith-systems. This observation is just as true of the animists who worship sticks as it is of the secular humanist who claims to be an agnostic and purely "scientific." Every worldview has faith commitments to things or ideas that cannot be proved by direct observation. The atheistic naturalists who dogmatically assert that man evolved from a primordial slime have never observed macro-evolution take place. In fact, the empirical evidence against macro-evolution is overwhelming and continues to grow. Men cling to absurd theories and ideas with a blind faith because they refuse to acknowledge the truth about God. "They exchanged the truth of God for the lie" (Rom. 1:25).

(2) Paul emphasizes the evil, abominable nature of idolatry by contrasting the incorruptibility of God with the corruptibility of man (Rom. 1:23). All forms of idolatry are a rejection of the creator-creature distinction. In rejecting the infinite, holy, perfect, immutable God of Scripture, men embrace that which is purely immanent, that which is created, fallen, decaying, changing and corruptible. In making this statement Paul is emphasizing the foolishness of idol worship (note that v. 23 is connected to verse 22 by the conjunction "and"). On the one side, Paul says, we have that which is holy, infinite, pure, just, righteous, all-powerful, all-knowing, unchanging, and full of goodness, mercy and truth. But on the other side we have fallen man: finite, sinful, depraved, filthy, unjust, and subject to death and decay. Only someone is totally spiritually blind and completely depraved would chose corruptible man and even beasts over Jehovah who is pure light in whom dwells no darkness (1 Jn. 1:15). Idolatry is madness, insanity, foolishness and blasphemy.

(3) In all forms of idolatry man himself is the god-maker. Thus, in every false system man is the ultimate source of meaning and ethics. While the believer defines God and the world according to the infallible Word of God and thus thinks God's thoughts after Him, the unbeliever is in rebellion against God's revelation (whether general or special) and thus puts an anti-God construction upon all reality. The unbeliever creates

his own reality and his own god. Because the unbeliever's starting point is apostate (i.e. the reprobate mind) he interprets reality in terms of an existence independent of God. For the unbeliever facts are not God-created and God-controlled facts but are brute facts that must receive organization and meaning only from man himself, independent of the Bible. Everything the unbeliever does is shaped by his ethical hostility to God.

In other words, in all forms of idolatry, ultimately it is man that is god over all gods. Man looks at the world and decides for himself what type of religion will meet his needs. Man observes reality and arbitrarily determines his own ethical standard. While he does all this he claims to be objective and scientific. He claims to have put behind him the superstitions of Christianity in order to bring forth an enlightened scientific age. But is the unbeliever really scientific and objective? No. As we have seen he views reality through the grid of hostility to God and his embrace of false gods, of a non-Christian worldview. For example, the man who claims to be a rationalist, who says that he will attain the truth only through reason or logic, always reasons in an anti-God direction. Why? First, he starts with apostate axioms, with anti-Christian presuppositions. He, even before observing reality, says the God of Scripture cannot exist. Second, in judging what is true or false or what is reasonable, anything that does not fit into his non-Christian presuppositions of reality (e.g. objective ethics, special revelation, miracles, creation *ex nihilo*, etc) is automatically deemed irrational no matter what the evidence says.

The same thing is true of the empiricist who says that he can determine the truth by looking at the facts around him, by organizing and analyzing "brute facts." But once again the empiricist observes reality through the lens of his apostate presuppositions. He automatically discards any "fact" that does not fit into his paradigm. Further, he perverts the "facts" because he interprets them according to his apostate, God-hating starting point. Thus, modern science is not really scientific in any of the theoretical areas. It is deeply religious with a blind faith in a totally absurd, non-factual worldview (macro-evolution).

Isaiah pointed out the utter foolishness of idolatry by noting that men make and control their idols. "They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver on the scales; they hire a goldsmith, and he makes it a god; they prostrate themselves, yes, they worship. They bear it on the shoulder, they carry it and set it in its place, and it stands; from its place it shall not move. Though one cries out to it, yet it cannot answer nor save him out of his trouble" (Isa. 46:6-7). Paul warned us that all human philosophies are against the Lord Jesus Christ, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the basic principles of the world and not according to Christ" (Col. 2:8). There is a radical antithesis between believing and unbelieving thought.

(4) Paul teaches that the first two commandments which require us to believe in, serve and worship the true God alone are foundational to the whole moral law of God. In Romans 1, the root of all sin is exchanging the true God for false gods. This point is a continuation of verse 18 which places ungodliness before unrighteousness. In verses 23, 25 and 28 after discussing the true God Paul mentions the moral consequences of rejecting the Lord: "Therefore God also gave them over to uncleanness" (v. 26); "God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting" (v. 28). Unbelief in the true God leads to sexual perversion, in particular homosexuality and lesbianism (vs. 24, 26, 27). It also leads to sinful vices of every sort (vs. 29-31).

Why does a rejection of the true God lead inexorably to moral degeneracy? The main reason is that laws are always theologically based. One's ethical system will always be a mirror reflection of one's concept of God or ultimate reality. If concepts of morality are to rest on some conviction of ultimacy one must have faith in a personal, infinite God who is holy, righteous and just and who will hold everyone accountable for their actions. The Greeks and Romans worshiped false gods that were immoral, arbitrary, perverse and violent. Thus, irrespective of their talk about love and virtue, their societies became ethical cesspools filled with all sorts of sexual perversion, violence and injustice. The ancient fertility cults of the Middle East and Africa worshiped gods obsessed with sex and thus ritual prostitution, fornication and adultery became integral aspects of these degenerate cultures.

The modern secular humanism so prominent in the world today is not any better than the superstitions of Rome, Greece or Canaan. Humanism denies the transcendent God who gives us moral absolutes; that is, laws that are non-negotiable and unchanging. The god of humanism is man. Therefore, the source of humanistic law is either: (a) whatever each individual decides (anarchism); (b) the determinations of an intellectual elite (e.g. socialism, Marxism and communism); (c) the opinions of the majority of society (democracy); or (d) a combination of two or more of the above. For example, in the United States there is fiat law from courts which function as an elite class. There is the direct determination of law by the masses via referendum. And there are the fiat laws created by elected representatives. (Since the early twentieth century America has shifted in large part from a constitutional republic to a participatory, semi-constitutional, fascist state. [Fascism is here being used in the sense of a state that leaves the means of production in private hands, yet heavily taxes and regulates the means of production to serve the Leviathan state]).

In a humanistic culture ethically everything boils down to a form of sentimental pragmatism. Such a view leads to ethical chaos. If young people think that premarital sex is okay as long as the people involved are "in love" and "use protection" then it is regarded as ethical. If an unborn child is very small and may be born into unfavorable circumstances or may not be loved or wanted, then it is ethical to put the little baby to death. If homosexuals are in a "committed relationship" and care for each other, then sodomy is considered virtuous. If some people have a lot of money while others have very little, then it is ethical for the state to take (i.e. steal) from the rich and give to the poor. Statism is justified by perceived "fairness." "The rich need to pay their fair share." At the Democratic convention a daughter of John Kerry told the moving tale of the Senator saving the life of hamster from drowning, which was meant to show Kerry's love and concern for the environment. Then almost immediately after the hamster story the daughter assured democrats that Kerry will protect abortion rights. In other words, hamsters deserve to be saved while little human beings do not. Schlossberg writes,

All forms of humanistic sentimental ethics have one common characteristic: subjectivism. Humanists decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong without any external entity to instruct them. Sentiment judges each situation on its merits. It may decide in one case on a subsidy, in another case on a fatal injection, in another on incarceration, in another on a state of permanent dependence. It is answerable to no one and nothing. Sentiment rules. In all these cases, of course, sentiment will be serving the interests of state, class, agency, corporation, university, or individual, but that is seldom

admitted. What rules is what Niebuhr called goodwill and Fletcher called love. Others will have different masks for it, but the reality will always be the same: Subjective emotional responses are the determinants of right and wrong.

As Niebuhr recognized in other contexts, our capacity for self-deception and self-justification is almost infinite. That is the reason sentiment as an ethical principle must lead to disaster. The law of God is the only hedge against that. “Now if I do what I do not want,” wrote the apostle, “I agree that the law is good” (Rom. 7:16). That is, if he recognizes that he has no self-righteousness, that the humanist delusion is fraudulent, then he needs the law to identify and restrain the evil that he might do. But the law of God only serves such a purpose if statutory law and the citizens recognize it. If lawmaking, however, is considered an expression of human autonomy, it will be idolatrous and eventually tyrannous. Statutory law then will be used to justify anything.<sup>11</sup>

Given Paul’s teaching on the rejection of the first two commandments as the cause of ethical chaos, we must recognize that the key to the Christian reconstruction of society is the preaching of the gospel. Indeed, the twin pillars of the Calvinist wing of the Reformation are the biblical doctrine of salvation (i.e. justification by faith alone) and biblical worship. A society will not and cannot be moral apart from believing in Christ and worshipping Him according to Scripture. All attempts by Christians at social reform apart from preaching Christ and teaching how God is to be lawfully worshiped are in vain.

(5) Paul’s teaching on man’s exchanging the truth of God for the lie tells us something very important about various non-Christian religions. These religions are not the result of people seeking God but the very opposite. People know the true God but invented false faiths to escape Him.

In colleges and universities today people are taught that monotheism or the belief in one all-powerful God developed or evolved slowly over time from primitive tribal religions. First there was “primitive” animism which evolved into various forms of polytheism (i.e. the belief in many gods). Then polytheism evolved into a concept of a panel of gods with one chief deity. Then polytheism evolved into monotheism or the worship of one God alone. Such a view which is purely theoretical (i.e. not based on any hard evidence) is the exact opposite of the truth. All false heathen religions are perversions of the one true faith. We know this to be true because: (a) Adam and Eve certainly knew the true God; and (b) Noah and his family knew the true and living God.

It is interesting that heathen university professors in their construction of the evolution of religion place monotheism at the top of the heap as the highest form of religion. Given their own presuppositions there is no reason to regard monotheism as any better than animism or polytheism. They (according to the humanist) are all false superstitions. The humanist can speak of monotheism as a virtue only if monotheism is *created and controlled by man*. Monotheism is better than polytheism because it is more clever and stable as a religious *invention*. According to the humanist, monotheism is just another sign of the greatness of human autonomy, or man as god and the sole determiner of truth.

(6) Paul refers to all non-Christian religions as “the lie.” A very common teaching today is that all religions essentially teach the same thing. They are all variations on a

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<sup>11</sup> Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 50.

common theme. People often say: “There are many paths that lead to God.” Such teaching is very popular today because: (a) Western nations have wholeheartedly embraced religious pluralism. It is taught that all religions are equally true and deserve respect; that one religion should not receive preference above another. This teaching is drummed into people’s minds from a very young age in public schools and from popular TV programs. If anything, the only religion that is not tolerated (that is, treated as inferior) is “fundamentalist Christianity” because it does not tolerate homosexuality, other faiths, socialism and the mother state. (b) Eastern religions tend to be monistic and irrational. They claim that Jesus, Buddha and Mohammed are simply incarnations of Krishna.

Paul rejects modern American thinking because he understands that all non-Christian religions are idolatrous perversions and rejections of the true God. As noted above false, religious systems are made to replace God, not to seek Him out and worship Him. But, some may ask, “What about other monontheistic faiths such as Judaism and Islam? Are they not all serving the same one true God?” No! They most certainly are not. Both are idolatrous cults that have rejected divine revelation, redefined God and rejected Jesus Christ. Both have embraced human autonomy as a source for truth over biblical revelation. As a result these non-Christian theistic systems or worldviews are arbitrary, self-contradictory and false.

As an example of how they have perverted and rejected God’s attributes of holiness and righteousness we only need to briefly consider their humanistic doctrine of salvation. Both Orthodox Judaism and Islam claim that they believe in absolute ethics which come from an absolute, unchanging God. But both Judaism and Islam reject the atoning, sacrificial death of the divine-human mediator—Jesus Christ—in favor of salvation by merit or works of righteousness. Now if God is ethically perfect and God’s law reflects His holy, righteous character, every sin must be punished. Guilt cannot just be *overlooked* by God; it must be *expiated*.<sup>12</sup> Only the sacrificial death of Christ in the place of His people, as a propitiation<sup>13</sup> for sin, can harmonize the fact that God is infinitely righteous with the reality that God saves sinners and allows them in His presence. God does not set aside His perfect righteousness in order to save sinners. God is both just and the justifier of the ungodly. “There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved” (Ac. 4:12). “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (Jn. 14:6). There is no neutrality or fence-sitting in God’s universe; one either embraces Jesus Christ by faith or one must place his trust in finite sinful man.

(7) Paul’s condemnation of idolatry is virtually identical to the Old Testament law. Deuteronomy 4:15-18 reads: “Take careful heed to yourself, for you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird

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<sup>12</sup> Expiation refers to the removal of the guilt and liability of punishment against sin by the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. Christ endured the suffering imposed by God against sin that we deserved.

<sup>13</sup> Propitiation refers to the Savior’s removal of God’s anger and enmity against sinners. By removing sin through His death, perfectly obeying the law and imputing His righteousness to elect sinners, believers are placed in God’s family and full fellowship is restored.

that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that is in the water beneath the earth.”

When the Bible condemns idolatry it not only condemns the direct religious homage to birds, beasts, reptiles and fish but also the use of an image as a symbol of something beyond the image. For example, when the Jews worshiped the golden calf at Mt. Sinai and the Israelites worshiped the cows at Bethel and Dan they did not regard the image as God Himself but as a symbol of His special presence. Likewise, when papists kiss and bow to statues of Mary, Jesus and the saints they in theory regard these images as merely aids to worship, and not things worshiped in themselves. The Bible, however, makes no such clever distinctions in its treatment of idolatry. “All who bowed down to stocks and stones are denounced as worshiping gods which their own hands had made; and idolatry is made to include not merely the worship of false gods, but the worship of the true God by images.”<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion and Application

Our study of the suppression, rejection and idolatrous replacement of the true God with idols raises a few very important questions.

First, are you running away from the one living and true God? Have you submitted yourself to a foolish worldview or some absurd view of reality to make yourself more comfortable in your sins? If you have, then you need to know that God is not mocked; right now His wrath rests upon you. God is giving you over to your rebellion and foolishness. Further, on the day of judgment you will be cast into hell where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt. 24:50-51). Your only hope is to forsake your foolishness and embrace the righteousness of God in Christ. You must abandon the wisdom of this world for the gospel of God. Paul writes,

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Cor. 1:18-25).

Second, are we worshiping God in a way that pleases Him? The Bible says that we are not to add or detract from the worship of God given to us in Scripture (Gen. 4:3-5; Ex. 20:4-5; Lev. 10:1-2; Dt. 12:28-32; 1 Chr. 15:13-15; Jer. 7:31; 19:5; 1 Sam. 13:11-13; 1 Kgs. 12:28-33; Mt. 15:1-9; Jn. 4:19-24; Mt. 28:20; Col. 2:20-23). That is, everything in worship must have divine warrant. Why is it very important that human wisdom or invention have no part in determining religious ordinances? Because: (a) God's nature is

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Hodge, *Romans*, 39.

such that He can only be approached on His own terms. Jehovah is so holy that we can only come into His presence through Christ according to the rules of worship that He has prescribed. (b) Human beings have a sinful nature that cannot be trusted to devise worship ordinances. When men use their own wisdom to invent worship ordinances they end up replacing the true worship of God with will-worship. Men have no authority to impose their ideas about worship on other believers. To do so is popish and tyrannical. All systems of man-made worship are species of idolatry and must be shunned, and avoided and opposed vigorously.

Third, we must set forth the gospel of Christ boldly, with authority, without shrinking back because unbelievers are not innocents seeking after truth, but covenant-breaking rebels. Paul did not witness to people by saying, “God has a wonderful plan for your life” or “please let Jesus into your heart.” He proclaimed, “God...commands all men everywhere to repent” (Ac. 17:30). Everyone has abandoned the truth for idols and gross immorality. They are not people who are simply ignorant and minding their own business. They are haters of God. We must never be afraid of telling people the gospel as if we are intruding upon their lives and insulting their poor ignorant views. As ambassadors of Christ we must be honest and tell them that they are guilty of suppressing the truth about God, that they are at war with Jehovah and enslaved to their idols. The gospel is their only hope. We must speak the truth in love. Speaking in a loving manner, however, never entails watering down, softening, or altering the truth.

May God enable us to witness to the lost without fear, with boldness coupled with love. Amen.

## Immorality

In Romans 1:18 and following Paul has been discussing the revelation of God’s wrath against men because of their rebellion against God. Thus far, Paul has discussed: (1) God’s perspicuous revelation of Himself to all men by general revelation. (2) The suppression of the truth regarding God. (3) The method of this suppression. The truth is exchanged for the lie. The true living God is exchanged for idols. (4) The intellectual and philosophical consequence of rejecting God: the heart or mind of man is darkened and foolish. Paul has described man’s willful rejection of God and apostasy which eliminates in gross idolatry (v. 23b).

In verse 24 Paul turns his attention to God’s judgment upon man’s apostasy. The “therefore” indicates that God’s retribution is being meted out because of the wickedness noted in the precious verses (i.e. rejecting God for idolatry). God’s judgment is described as an active judicial abandonment of men over to immorality. The phrase “God gave them up” occurs three times in this section (vs. 24, 26, 28). This phrase is significant because it emphasized that the punishment fits the crime. Men gave up God for idols. Therefore, God gave up men to their own sinful passions. The penalty for rejecting God is to be handed over to the power of sin.

Before we turn our attention to a specific analysis of this section of Scripture there are some general principles that merit our attention.

First, note that God is very active in the affairs of men. “He governs all things according to the counsel of his own will and the nature of His creatures. What happens as consequences does not come by chance, but as designed; and the sequence is required by

His control.”<sup>15</sup> As Christians it is important that we recognize this and meditate upon it, for when history looks as though it is moving against us we can rest assured that it ultimately will work out for the good of Christ’s church.

(2) The passage implies that there is a certain restraining power wrought on unbelieving men by God that can be withheld causing a society or culture to fall into even greater moral chaos and destruction. The phrase “in the lust of their hearts” indicates that the heathen were already in a perverse inward moral condition when judged by God. God’s retribution did not cause their uncleanness it rather consists in *a giving over* to the uncleanness they already had. If God withholds His “common grace” or restraining power the heathen run headlong into every form of dissipation and madness in the world. All of this presupposes that people and nations are given periods of time to repent before they are completely turned over to moral degradation and self-destruction. This pattern was followed to a degree in the days of Noah (Gen. 6:5; 1 Pet. 3:20); the seven Canaanite nations (Deut. 7: ); and, rebellious Israel and Judah ( ; Mt. 24). God waits patiently with longsuffering for repentance, yet (in the case of nations that do not convert to Christ) he judicially hardens a nation increasing its slavery to sin, its wickedness and ripening it for destruction.

(3) As noted, the punishment for rejecting God and committing sin is further enslavement to and serving of sin. Sin is the punishment for sin. “We see that sin follows sin as an avenger.”<sup>16</sup>

(4) In this section of Scripture Paul will focus his attention on sexual sin, in particular homosexuality and lesbians. While it is possible that verse 24 refers to sexual sin in general, it is likely given the context that verse 24, as well as verses 26 and 27, is referring to homosexuality and lesbianism. This raises the question: Why does Paul focus his attention on homosexual relations? The apostle condemns homosexuality in other epistles, yet in this passage he singles it out. There are a number of reasons for this. First, there is the way the perversions of homosexuality mirror idolatry. “[I]t functions as the best illustration of that which is unnatural in the sexual sphere. Idolatry is “unnatural” in the sense that it is contrary to God’s intention for human beings. To worship corruptible animals and human beings instead of the incorruptible God is to turn the created order upside down. In the sexual sphere the mirror image of this ‘unnatural’ choice of idolatry is homosexuality (cf. Schlatter 1995: 43; Hays, 1986: 191). Human beings were intended to have sexual relations with those of the opposite sex. Just as idolatry is a violation and perversion of what God intended, so too homosexual relations are contrary to what God planned when he created man and woman.”<sup>17</sup> Second, Paul picks a particularly disgusting, gross degenerate form of sin in order to show the logical and inevitable outcome of a life without God. Homosexuality is the culmination of apostasy. Rushdoony writes, “Homosexuality is thus the culminating sexual practice of a culminating apostasy and hostility towards God. The homosexual is at war with God, and, in his every practice, is denying God’s natural order and law. The theological aspect of homosexuality is thus

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Hodge, *Romans*, 40.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Thomas R. Scheiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 94.

emphasized in Scripture. In history, homosexuality becomes prominent in every area of apostasy and time of decline. It is an end of an age phenomenon.”<sup>18</sup>

### *How Does the Bible Define Homosexuality?*

In our own day, when corrupt modernistic church leaders, self-serving politicians, the “mainstream” news media, Hollywood, and the secular priesthood of psychologists and psychiatrists have all accepted homosexual behavior as moral, praiseworthy and even a positive good, it is very important that we understand exactly what the Bible teaches about homosexuality. The sad reality of modern secular, post-Christian culture makes a careful analysis of Paul’s teaching in Romans one all the more important. As we examine the apostle’s assessment of homosexuality and lesbianism we will interact with other important passages on this topic. After our analysis of this section of Scripture we will deal with modern objections to the Bible teachings on this topic and make some important observations and applications. (For those who read or hear this sermon which are favorable toward homosexual behavior we ask that you keep four very important things in mind: First, the Bible (the 66 books of the Old and New Testament are inspired [lit. God-breathed] by God, 2 Tim. 3:16; and thus are infallible, inerrant and absolutely true or trustworthy in every area to which it speaks whether religion, science, ethics, or philosophy. Second, the Bible is not culturally conditioned. That is, it is completely wrong to attribute the ethical standards in the Bible as something derived from ancient primitive cultures. Third, the teaching of the Bible actually reflects the mind of God in propositional form in every area to which it speaks. If God condemns something, then we must accept it as true and submit to it whether we personally like it or not. Fourth, if we are to really understand the Bible we must not impose our own presuppositions upon it, but rather accept the literal, contextual, historical, grammatical meaning of words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs all in historical and didactic (i.e. non-apocalyptic or metaphorical) sections of Scripture. If we make up our minds what is right or wrong before we go to the text of Scripture and then simply impose our own ideas onto the text of Scripture we are dishonest and we are wasting our time. We must be willing to let God be true and every autonomous man or liar (Rom. 3:4).

Let us now turn our attention to the manner in which Paul and the Bible defines homosexuality. There are many words and phrases related to this behavior.

(1) The apostle says that God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts. The word uncleanness (*akatharsian*) is often used by Paul in connection with sexual sins (e.g. 2 Cor. 12:21, *uncleanness*, fornication [sexual immorality], and lewdness;” Gal. 5:19, “adultery, fornication, *uncleanness*, lewdness;” Eph. 5:3, “fornication and all *uncleanness* or covetousness;” Col. 3:5, “fornication, *uncleanness*, passion, evil desire;” 1 Thess. 4:7, “God did not call us to *uncleanness*, but in holiness”). The word uncleanness is a general term for *impurity* which in this context and most others refers to sexual impurity. Here it is connected to “the lusts of their hearts” which indicates that these people had a passionate inner desire for impure or filthy sexual relations. God gave them over to sexually perverse or filthy inner lusts.

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<sup>18</sup> Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 423.

Note that in this section of Scripture of Scripture Paul repeatedly moves from inner illicit filthy desires to outward evil sexual acts: “God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts” (v. 24); “God gave them up to vile passions” (v. 26); “God gave them up to a debased mind” (v. 28). In the Bible sin always begins in the heart with evil desires, impure lusts or vile passions and then moves on to sinful words or actions. This point is especially noteworthy in a discussion of homosexuality because it is common today for people (e.g. neo-evangelicals, the Roman Catholic Church) today to argue that one’s orientation or inner desires are perfectly okay as long as they are not acted upon. This position not only assumes (without any real scientific evidence) that people are born as homosexuals, but it also violates the biblical principles that illicit inner lusts are sinful and condemned by God. The biblical solution to homosexuality is not: remain in your vile passions but don’t act upon them. But rather, repent and develop lawful passions and actions. A man’s sexual desires must be directed to a Christian wife in heterosexual monogamous marriage.

(2) In verse 26 Paul says they are given over to “vile affections” (*pathe atimias*), “shameful lusts” (NIV), “degrading passions” (NASB), or “dishonorable passions” (RSV). The Greek phrase means literally “passions of dishonor.” Paul says that homosexual lusts are disgraceful and shameful. There is absolutely nothing honorable or worthy of praise in them whatsoever. Verse 26 harkens to verse 24 where it says they “dishonor their bodies among themselves.” Lenski writes, “Is it not the desire of all ungodly men to get as much honor as possible, especially also to make their bodies as grand and beautiful as possible? But look at the ungodly. Even their bodies wallow in the uncleanness of moral filth, they disgrace themselves before the whole world.”<sup>19</sup> Paul teaches that both homosexual inner lusts and activities are dishonorable, ignoble, shameful, disgraceful and filthy or perverse.

The apostle’s assessment is particularly interesting given the fact that the main obsession of the homosexual, lesbian and trans-gendered movement is to force society and everyone in it to say the exact opposite, that homosexual desires, and actions are honorable, normal, acceptable and even noble. Homosexuals have “gay pride parades” days, weeks and months honoring sodomites, their lifestyle and their “culture.” They have protest groups, lobbyists, lawyers, organizations and politicians whose main purpose in life is to de-Christianize all laws relating to sodomy and homosexual perversion and replace them with laws that discriminate against Bible-believing Christians. They have even been successful at coercing the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality as a “mental illness” in 1973. Why don’t homosexuals simply go about their perversions quietly in private without making a spectacle out themselves? The answer is simple. They are suppressing the truth about God and are at war with His law. They hate the light of God’s Word and must do everything possible to extinguish it because their deeds are evil and deep down they know they are evil. All Christians need to be aware that if the present pro-homosexual agenda continues to have the great successes it has had in the media, courts, civil government and the private sector, all Bible-believing Christians who are faithful to God’s Word will eventually be persecuted. In some western countries they already are,

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<sup>19</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, [1945] 1961), 109-110.

for so-called “hate speech.” The homosexual’s hatred of God and suppression of the truth extends to God’s own people.

Note also that while homosexuality is said to be dishonorable, shameful or disgraceful the New Testament says the exact opposite regarding heterosexual monogamous marriage. “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4). The reference to “fornication” or “sexual immorality” refers to anyone whether heterosexual or homosexual who engages in sexual relations outside of marriage. Marriage is special because God Himself ordained it before the fall almost immediately after creation (Gen. 2:19). It was the first ordinance instituted by God and was solemnized by God Himself. He as Adam’s Father presented Eve to him. We must place a special honor upon marriage because God places a special honor upon it.

When Jesus criticized unlawful divorce in Matthew 19:4ff, He used the marriage of Adam and Eve in paradise as the reason that marriage ought to be between one man and one woman and ought not to be dissolved for “just any reason” (v. 3). Our Lord referred to Genesis 2:24 as a creation ordinance that is binding on all subsequent generations. God set the pattern for all subsequent marriage relationships with the marriage of Adam and Eve. Therefore, the idea that homosexual marriage can be honorable or acceptable with God is an abomination. God created one man and one woman. He did not create two men or two women.

(3) Paul refers to homosexuality and lesbianism as unnatural. “For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman...” (vs. 26-27). Homosexual relations violate the created intent for both men and women. God made Adam and Eve, joined them in marriage and told them to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:22). They were uniquely designed to have sexual relations and these sexual relations served a God-ordained purpose. They were to become one flesh (Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:31). They were to produce children through sexual intercourse; and the two different sexes (male and female) united in marriage were to mirror the relationship between Christ and the church: the male being the covenant head—the leader—and the wife (the woman) being in subjection—the follower.

Homosexual relations violate the original intent of the Creator at every key point.

a) Two men or two women can have sexual relations with each other. But, they cannot have natural, God-intended sexual intercourse. The male sex organ is uniquely suited to the female sex organ. Two men can only engage in sodomy or anal sex which is unnatural, perverse, explicitly forbidden by Scripture (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:24ff; 1 Tim. 1:8-10) and leads to a multitude of medical problems and diseases.

b) Two men or two women can have sexual relations; but, they can never *naturally* produce children. In modern times they produce only bastards by means of fornication or artificial insemination.

c) When two men or two women pretend to be married, who is the covenant head? Covenant headship is determined by sex (male=head; female=helpmeet) of the married partners. Interestingly, Paul uses unusual words for male (*arsen*) and female (*thelys*) in verse 27 instead of the common words (man, *aner*; woman, *gyne*) because (most likely) these are the same words used in the LXX in Genesis 1:27. Paul is emphasizing the sexual distinctiveness of male and female and calling attention to the creation account where God determined what is natural. In so-called gay or lesbian

“marriages” covenant headship and the biblical image of Christ and the church cannot exist.

Homosexuals who call themselves “Christians” argue against this passage in two different ways. Some argue that Paul was only condemning pederasty (i.e. man-boy relationships) because such relationships involved exploitation. The problem with this argument is: a) This section of Scripture in question says absolutely nothing about pederasty. This interpretation is non-textual and totally arbitrary. b) While pederasty existed in the Greco-Roman world there was no corresponding practice between women and young girls. Paul’s explicit condemnation of lesbianism destroys the pederasty theory.

Another attempt to circumvent the explicit teaching of Paul is the idea that the term “unnatural” is subjective; meaning the behavior is unnatural only to the person practicing it. In other words, homosexual sex is only condemned when practiced by heterosexuals. This argument is preposterous and absurd for three reasons: a) It assumes but never proves the homosexual propaganda that homosexuality in some people is normal and constitutional. (Obviously, such an interpretation is a case of taking a twentieth century pro-homosexual theory regarding orientation and act and imposing it upon Paul as if he was a modernist, sodomite professor at Harvard or NYU. b) It ignores the immediate context where Paul says homosexuality is a result of filthy lusts (uncleanness), is dishonorable (vs. 24, 26), shameful (v. 27), error (v. 27), improper or “not fitting” (v. 28); the result of a “debased mind” (v. 28) and “worthy of death” (v. 32). c) It disregards the explicit teaching of the Old Testament (Lev. 19:22).

(4) In verse 27 Paul says “they burned in their lust for one another, men with men.” The Greek verb *ekkaio* (“burn”) is only used here in the entire New Testament. It is a strong term indicating the burning of an insatiable lust. These men were consumed with sinful lust. The terms are terrible in their intensity indicating the rage of lust. The verb is passive and literally means “burned out.” The terminology used by Paul reminds one of the activities of the homosexuals of Sodom. The men of Sodom were so full of lust and rage they would not take no for an answer and were willing to rape Lot’s guest if necessary (see Gen. 19; Jude 7). Bahnsen writes,

In a sense, homosexuality is the cultural culmination of rebellion against God. It represents the “burning out” of man and his culture. Paul described accompanying aspects of a culture that reaches this stage in verses 29-31. The vices enumerated by Paul accompany the open practice of homosexuality and characterize a society in which homosexuality is practiced and tolerated. Therefore, homosexuality that is publicly accepted is symptomatic of a society under judgment, inwardly corrupted to the point of impending collapse. Paul the apostle regarded it as the most overt evidence of that degeneracy to which God in His wrath gave over the nations.<sup>20</sup>

It is important once again to recognize that Paul condemns both the inward strong desire or lust of homosexuality and the outward act. By doing this the apostle decisively refutes homosexual apologists who attempt to justify their behavior by arguing, “I was born a homosexual—God make me this way; therefore, my thoughts, desires and lifestyle

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<sup>20</sup> Greg L. Bahnsen, *Homosexuality: A Biblical View* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1978), 59.

should not be condemned.” For the divinely inspired authors of Scripture the central question regarding personal ethics is never, “was I born with certain desires and proclivities;” but, “does God’s law forbid my thoughts, desires and actions?” The fact that all human beings are born with an orientation (or proclivity) toward sin does not excuse sinful lusts or behavior. The Bible says that all men are born liars (Ps. 58:3). Yet the Bible also says that lying is a sin (Ex. 20:16, Dt.5:20); it further says that liars will not enter the kingdom of God (Rev. 21:27). If some people are born with a proclivity toward theft, homosexuality, murder, bestiality, sadomasochism, mutilation etc., that does not somehow excuse their sinful behavior. The argument that orientation towards homosexuality somehow makes it acceptable to God could be used to excuse all sinful behavior. Such an argument destroys personal responsibility; it renders God’s law meaningless and salvation through Jesus Christ unnecessary. All men will be held responsible before God for every sinful thought, word and deed, regardless of one’s orientation.

(5) Paul says that homosexuals commit what is “shameful” (v. 27, NJKV), “indecent” (NIV, NASB), or “unseemly” (KJV). The Greek word *aschemosumen* used only here and Revelation 16:15 comes from *aschemon* which means deformed.<sup>21</sup> The apostle is saying that homosexual behavior is intrinsically obscene, nasty impure and foul.

(6) The apostle describes homosexuality as “the penalty of their error which was due” (v. 27).”The context suggests that the ‘penalty’ is not something in addition to homosexuality. The penalty is rather being handed over to the sin of homosexuality itself.”<sup>22</sup> The “error” of rejecting the true God for idols described in verses 21-23 and 25 leads to a judicial handing over to moral squalor the capstone of which is the debauchery of homosexuality. Lenski writes,

That recompense is the vicious effect of the unnatural sexual vices upon men’s own bodies and their minds, corrupting, destroying, disintegrating. The thought is this: deliberately rejecting the knowledge of God which they had by nature because they loved all sorts of unrighteousness which this knowledge would most certainly have condemned, God gave men over to the sin they would not let go at any price, to its most disgraceful and disgusting forms, and in their delusion practicing these, they received as due reward the awful results in their own corroding bodies. It is noteworthy that in the Scriptures as in human experience sexual sins, and not only the worst form of these, carry a special curse; they not only disgrace, they wreck; their punishment is direct, wretched, sever. For this reason Paul is justified in taking them out of his general catalog given in v. 28-32 and in treating them separately.<sup>23</sup>

(7) Paul says that those who practice homosexuality and approve of those who practice such vile behavior are “deserving of death” (v. 32). Homosexuals and their apologists (as well as the practitioners of all the vices enumerated in verses 29-31) are guilty because they know the true God who has revealed Himself in nature and have rejected that knowledge. Also, they know their behavior is wrong because of their God-

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<sup>21</sup> See Archibald T. Richardson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1931] n. d.), 4:331.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 97.

<sup>23</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, 400-401.

given conscience (2:14, 15). Therefore, they are sinning against better knowledge. They are living in open rebellion against God.

The word “death” here in context is general and refers to the judicial sentence of death connected with all sin. Sin merits death: spiritual, physical and eternal. That Paul is not referring specifically to the civil penalty connected with homosexuality is proven by the fact that some of the vices enumerated are not death penalty offenses. The apostle teaches that homosexuals and sodomites will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10). They need to repent and believe in Jesus Christ if they are to be saved. The idea of a Christian homosexual is an abomination. It is just as absurd as the idea of a Christian murderer, thief or child molester.

Romans 1:32 is a strong indictment against all people who condone, applaud, approve of and aid the homosexual lifestyle. “[T]hose who condone and applaud the vicious [perverted] actions of others are actually making a deliberate contribution to the setting up of a public opinion favourable to vice, and so to the corruption of an indefinite number of other people.”<sup>24</sup> It is the height of evil when people openly approve of and encourage gross perversions in the name of justice, fairness and equality. Their efforts at the legitimization of the homosexual perversion have led political, cultural and educational leaders to call the sodomite lifestyle a virtue and the Christian response to it: bigotry, homophobia, discrimination and evil. These wretched men and women have cast aside all shame and decency in order to promote filthy unlawful perversions. Their judgment by God will no doubt be severe yet deserved.

(8) Paul’s teaching on homosexuality is a reflection of the Old Testament moral law which refers to homosexuality as an abomination deserving of the death penalty. “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination....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” (Lev. 18:22; 20:13). Wenham writes, “Homosexuality is condemned throughout Scripture (Gen. 19; Lev. 20:13; Judg. 19:22 ff.; Rom. 1:27; 1 Cor. 6:9). *Abomination*, a term of strong disapproval in Hebrew (*to’ebah*), is used five times in this chapter (vv. 22, 26, 27, 29, 30) and in 20:13. It is more common in Deuteronomy (17 times), in Proverbs (21 times), and in Ezekiel (43 times). Other writers use it less often. It comes from a root meaning “to hate” or “abhor.” An abomination is literally something detestable and hated by God (e.g., Prov. 6:16; 11:1).<sup>25</sup> Scripture could not be any clearer. Homosexuality is totally repugnant to the Lord. He hates it so much that the persons involved in it are to be put to death by the civil magistrate.

Homosexuals attempt to circumvent the teaching of God’s law with the claim that God’s law is only directed against homosexual cultic prostitution. Against this claim orthodox Christian interpreters point out that: (a) The passages in question say absolutely nothing about cultic prostitution. Therefore, the pro-homosexual view has to be read into the passages. (b) The passages under discussion (especially Lev. 20:13) are given in a context of laws that deal with sexual ethics in general. If the other sexual prohibitions have nothing to do with ritual prostitution, then there is no contextual reason whatsoever to regard the prohibition against homosexuality as a narrow ritualistic prohibition. (c)

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<sup>24</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 135.

<sup>25</sup> G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 259.

Even if a passage in Scripture does deal with ritual homosexual prostitution (e.g., possibly Deut. 23:17-18), it is exegetically illegitimate to condense many separate prohibitions into one. (d) As already noted, homosexuality of every kind is condemned throughout the Bible. Therefore, an explicit prohibition in God's law is to be expected. Unfortunately pro-homosexual interpreters are not objective and are not interested in the truth; they are only interested in justifying their wicked perverted behavior.

### *General Comments and Application*

Paul's discussion of homosexuality in Romans 1 is very important and relevant for modern Christians because homosexuality is almost completely accepted as normal in our post-Christian culture. This sad fact raises a number of questions: (1) How did homosexuality become acceptable and even popular in our society? (2) Why should the acceptance and spread of homosexuality in our culture alarm believers? (3) What can Christians and churches do to help stem the rising tide of perverted sexuality that is sweeping our nation?

(1) The acceptance of homosexual behavior in the West is the result of nations abandoning the Christian world and life view for secular humanism. Before the rise of Christianity and its dominance over large geographical areas homosexuality was common and accepted throughout many parts of the earth. It was practiced among the Greeks, Chinese and Arabs just to name a few. The spread of Christianity in the world resulted in the rejection of heathen promiscuity and perversions and resulted in a strong sexual ethic in which monogamous heterosexual marriage was exalted.

The decline in biblical sexual ethics arose in the west with the Enlightenment (an 18<sup>th</sup> century European philosophical movement characterized by skepticism, rationalism, empiricism and anti-supernaturalistic presuppositions). It was during this period that a number of important biblical doctrines tangentially related to sexual ethics were denied by intellectuals. During this period the fall of man was denied which led to the idea that man and nature in their current (fallen) state were good and normative. This idea led men to determine ethics not by what ought to be according to God's special revelation; but, to what was being practiced by fallen, sinful men. During this time radical thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau were setting forth the idea of the noble savage uncorrupted by modern civilization. All of these notions contributed to a view of good and freedom as whatever came *naturally*. They viewed Christianity with its strict sexual and family ethics as debilitating, as an artificial obstruction to human happiness. Fortunately, these radical thinkers were largely ignored and rejected by most of the common people (except perhaps in France). But, they laid the ground work for the ethical chaos that would arise in the West.

The real damage to sexual ethics came from two simultaneous facts. One was the acceptance of modernism or Christian liberalism in all the mainline denominations throughout the United States, Canada, Europe and Australia. Because modernism rejected God's word as infallible or inerrant; rejected the ultimate authority of the Bible; and, uncritically accepted the findings of modern secular science as nonnegotiable truths or facts, the liberal churches became prophets of secularization and human autonomy in ethics. Without God's word as a solid foundation of truth and ethical absolutes, the

mainline churches began more and more to reflect the rising secularism and naturalism of the unbelieving world.

Coupled with the rise of modernism was the replacement of pastors and elders as counselors of family and sexual problems with the secular priesthood of psychologists and psychiatrists. Because the fields of psychology and psychiatrists are secular; perversions such as homosexuality could no longer be labeled with such “antiquated” religious concepts such as sin or iniquity. They were now considered to be mental diseases or sicknesses. Because the fields of psychiatry and psychology are not hard sciences where findings can be verified by repeated experimentation and empirical observation, views on sexual behavior and deviancy during the twentieth century are all over the map. The findings on human sexuality became nothing more than speculations of psychologists and psychiatrists. Most if not all people in the field of sexuality were themselves perverts with an ax to grind (e.g. Alfred Kinsey). During the twentieth century homosexuality went from being considered a sin, to a disease or mental disorder, to a perfectly normal alternative lifestyle (1973).

What brought our culture to its present state of ethical chaos was the sexual revolution of the 1960s. The teachings of the Enlightenment, coupled with the Darwinian revolution in science, the victory of modernism over the mainline Protestant denominations and the widespread acceptance of the secular medical model in human sexuality all came to a head during the 1960s. It was during this time that widespread fornication, adultery, abortion on demand, co-habitation and homosexual perversions became an increasingly accepted aspect of American society. The saying that best characterizes the hedonism of the 1960s is: “If it feels good, do it.” The Enlightenment idea that whatever man did was “natural” and therefore good had come home to roost. The apostate version of Christianity in the mainline denominations could no longer stem the tide of ethical chaos. Instead, they wholeheartedly embraced it.

Out of the protests for “rights” and against the war in Vietnam during this time began the modern homosexual rights movement. This movement traces its beginning to the Stonewall homosexual riots that took place in the spring of 1969 after a “gay” bar was raided by the police. Since that time, homosexuals have very effectively applied the 1960s hippie radical tactics of protest, disruption, ridicule and the more modern use of lobbyists, lawyers and lawsuits. They have in a clever, deceitful manner applied the terminology of the civil rights movement to themselves even though a chosen lifestyle has nothing to do with the situation of black Americans who were persecuted and abused because of skin color not perverted behavior. They also have been very effective at labeling their opponents as bigots and homophobes. They accomplished much of this because of their support by a “liberal” news media, by an ethically corrupt Hollywood, by leftist university professors and professors and by evil judges and politicians. With our country’s rejection of Christ and the Bible and acceptance of secular humanism and relativism we are becoming a nation of whores and homosexuals.

(2) As Christians we need to be aware of the direction our nation has taken and do everything we can biblically to turn it around. Why is the acceptance and spread of homosexuality throughout America such an alarming thing? There are a number of reasons why professing Christians need to wake up to what is happening.

a) The homosexual movement is a radical revolution against Biblical faith and ethics. We are in the midst of a clash of two antithetic worldviews which cannot coexist

in peace. The homosexual agenda involves a radical redefinition of the Bible: Jesus is the open-armed receiver of all perverts who *does not require repentance* and who *is a pro-homosexual antinomian*. It involves the rejection of biblical law in favor of man-made, arbitrary, relativistic law. For the homosexual, ethics are determined by what seems right, by sentiment. It involves the destruction of the biblically defined family which is the foundation of Christian civilization. The family is no longer defined as a man and woman united by a binding covenant in marriage raising children together. It now is just anyone (man-man, woman-woman, three women, two transvestites, etc) who decide they want to be together for an undetermined period of time. As noted such situations are unnatural, have no real covenant head and set before children a lifestyle of perversion, rebellion against God, fornication and death. "From the biblical perspective, any and every 'search' for the totality of the other human being apart from God is vicious, depraved and under condemnation. This search is honored only where God is not honored in His law-word.... It is because of the theological aspect of homosexuality, its war against God, that it is...also a war against man and against oneself.... Homosexual cultures are at war with God; in this war there are no negotiations possible."<sup>26</sup>

b) The homosexual movement seeks to dominate every aspect of American culture. The homosexual culture already has extensive control and fellow travelers in the mainstream news media, the Hollywood entertainment industry (sitcoms, movies and "reality" television programs not only often have homosexual characters but these characters are almost always portrayed in a positive light [i.e. They are either heroes, lead characters who are clever and funny or they are poor, persecuted souls who just need to be understood and treated fairly] while Christians are portrayed as crazy, hypocrites, bigots, terrorists and murderers); the world of fashion; the theater ("because the homosexual lives against reality and in world of make-believe, he has therefore found the theater to be a happy element for his self-realization."<sup>27</sup> The world of the theater has been dominated by whoremongers, fornicators and sodomites since ancient Greece.); advertising; the Democratic Party; dance (during the 1980s and early 1990s many homosexual dancers died of AIDS); and the universities and colleges. Because of its extensive control over all forms of the mainstream media, entertainment outlets, women's magazines, fashions and politicians, "Western countries have been radically infected with the parasitic homosexual culture."<sup>28</sup> The canons of homosexual culture are now accepted by the majority of Americans, especially women, young people and intellectuals. There has been a shift in America from a Christian culture to a selfish, hedonistic, "do whatever you want," politically correct culture.

c) The widespread acceptance and practice of homosexuality in a culture is an indication of a society in the last stages of apostasy, near judgment and destruction. "In history, homosexuality becomes prominent in every area of apostasy and time of decline. It is an end of the age phenomenon."<sup>29</sup> The decriminalization of homosexuality in the West and the official recognition of it through civil union laws, homosexual marriage laws, domestic partner health care legislation, non-discrimination ordinances and rulings and the funding of homosexual activists at the local, state and federal level all spell the

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<sup>26</sup> Rousas John Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 424-425.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 424.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 423.

doom of these nations. “When a people reaches a certain level of moral depravity, punishment ceases to be particular and becomes national. The civil order has lost its ability to act for God, and God then acts against that order.”<sup>30</sup> Because there is no neutrality and no possible compromise between light and darkness, a pro-homosexual law system of necessity is anti-Christian. If freedom and rights are to be extended to homosexuals, then they must be denied to Christians. We “hate speech” legislation. Such legislation makes it a crime to teach the Bible publicly to others because Scripture refers to homosexuality as a sinful, shameful, indecent, perverse, soul-damning abomination worthy of the death penalty. A pro-homosexual law-order entails the direct persecution of Bible-believing Christians. The persecution of Christians involves a direct war against Jesus Christ. Such a war can only bring God’s wrath upon a nation. The Lord will not tolerate a homosexual culture or the abuse of His people.

(3) While there is no doubt that the current situation in America is dire and getting worse, there is a lot that believers can do to return our nation to its Christian roots.

a) One thing we must do as churches is preach the whole counsel of God, in particular the teaching of God’s moral law as a light to the nations. At one time, the laws in Europe and America reflected biblical law. Sins such as adultery, homosexuality and bestiality were crimes punishable by death. (Lutheran and Reformed theologians referred to this as the third use of the law.) In America pluralism, modernism and concepts such as positivistic law have progressively destroyed the Christian character of our laws. Because believers have a responsibility to be a salt and light to our culture they must fight for the adoption of biblical law in our nation. If Christians accept pluralism and adopt the position that civil law must somehow be neutral and not explicitly based on Scripture, then our nation is doomed. There is no neutrality. We cannot have a God-honoring law system based on vague notions regarding natural law.

b) It is vital that we speak the gospel to our neighbors. Unbelievers who are saturated with secular humanistic propaganda view Christianity as a religion of condemnation and hatred. The truth is that only biblical Christianity offers mankind hope and genuine reconciliation between God and sinners; as well as between men and their enemies. As ambassadors of Christ who ourselves have been forgiven a multitude of heinous sins, we must reach out to homosexuals with the good news that Christ’s blood can remove the guilt of our sins and we can be clothed with His perfect righteousness. While it may be popular to tell homosexuals that their behavior is perfectly okay, it certainly is not loving to lie to people about their spiritual condition. Once homosexuals understand that their behavior is not a mental disorder or an unchangeable hereditary condition but a sin, they can escape from despair because Jesus saves from both the guilt and the power of sin (see Rom. 6, 7, 8). The same Paul who did not mince words about homosexuality in Romans 1 acknowledged that homosexuals can be delivered if they trust in Christ and repent of their former lifestyle. After Paul says that practicing homosexuals are excluded from God’s kingdom he says, “And such were [past tense] some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11).

Bahnsen succinctly summarizes our responsibility in this area before God. He writes, “[T]he Christian must have a *twofold response* to homosexuality. He must work for righteousness in society, petitioning the civil magistrate to avenge God’s wrath

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 425.

against evildoers, and he must work for the salvation of individual homosexuals, rebuking sin and offering the restorative grace of God in the gospel. Evangelism is not inconsistent with the social endorsement of God's law, for the Great Commission demands *both*.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Greg L. Bahnsen, *Homosexuality: A Biblical View*, 133-134.