

After greeting the church at Rome, the apostle Paul spends the remainder of the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans describing the depths of sin that the human race can sink when they reject God. Paul easily could have written this first chapter today because anyone familiar with current events can see the evidence of what happens when people reject Jesus Christ to follow their own sinful desires.

The epistle of Romans was written by the apostle Paul from the city of Corinth. He had not yet visited Rome but had heard of the faith of the church at Rome (Rom. 1:8) and was hoping to be able to soon make the trip so that he could minister to them. In the meantime, Paul was writing to the church to help ground them in the fundamentals of the faith. In fact, although Paul does not cover all NT doctrines, anyone who gets a good grasp of the teachings discussed in the book of Romans will have gone a long way in understanding the fundamental truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Verses 1-17: Paul introduces himself as an apostle and then briefly describes the gospel that he has been called to preach (vs. 1-6). He then indicates the intended recipients of his letter as the believers at Rome (v. 7). He speaks of his gratefulness for the believers in Rome and the fact that he has asked God to allow him to visit them so that he could minister to them (vs. 8-13). He then expresses his desire to preach the gospel to them, a message that he is not ashamed to proclaim because of the power to change lives that is inherent in it (vs. 14-16). He also states that the gospel reveals the righteous of God through the conduit of faith (v. 17).

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; 19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness” – After stating that the gospel reveals the righteousness of God (v. 17), Paul describes how the gospel does this: by revealing that God is against unrighteousness. The gospel reveals the wrath of God against the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men, which is why they need a Savior.

“of men who hold [to restrain; to suppress; to hinder] the truth in unrighteousness” – Ungodly and unrighteous men suppress the truth through their unrighteous ways. They refuse to accept the truth and attempt to suppress it so that they can continue to believe the lies that they want to believe. Peter spoke of those who were willingly ignorant of the truth of God (2 Pet. 3:5). For instance, today people will ignore Gen. 1:1 because they would rather believe that the universe came into being spontaneously through natural forces and they will suppress the truth through ridicule and the banning of the teaching of Creationism or intelligent design in our schools.

“Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them” – God has made man so that man inherently knows that God exists. He gave man a conscience to understand God’s righteous law. He gave man a brain that can reason and see the evidence of God’s existence in the creation that He made. Yet men will unrighteously suppress these truths that they are unwilling to accept despite what God has shown them.

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

The evidence of the power and deity of an invisible God have been visible since the creation of the world. The complexity of the universe and the life within it could not have come into being by random chance and so it is obvious to an open mind that only the intelligence of God could have created it. **Psalm 19:1-3** says “*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.*” The evidence that God exists and created everything is in front of man so that they have not excuse for not seeing and accepting it. Theologians call this *general revelation* and is distinct from *specific revelation*, which comes from the word of God and reveals Jesus Christ as Savior.

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

“Because that, when they knew God” – Men have no excuse for not recognizing and glorifying God because “they knew God” through general revelation.

“they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful” – Rather than worshiping and glorifying God, they instead rejected Him and turned their backs on Him. They were not thankful for the blessings that they enjoyed that came from Him, such as life, rain for their crops, etc.

“but became vain [empty; foolish] in their imaginations [thoughts; reasonings], and their foolish heart was darkened” – When men reject the truth, all that is left for them to believe are fantasies. Their ideas about reality become foolish as they appeal to silly ideas like false gods, evolution and aliens to explain the origins of life as they attempt to avoid the reality that God created it all. Their hearts were “darkened” so that they cannot see the foolishness of their ideas. When men reject light, all that is left is darkness.

22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

They believe themselves to be too smart to believe in God, saying that they have grown past believing in “fables.” Thus, by turning their back on the truth, they have become fools because they think their ways are superior.

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

Rather than giving God the worship that He deserves, these men instead turned to idols that were formed in the images of men, birds or other animals. They exchanged the glory of the incorruptible [*unable to perish or decay; eternal*] God for idols made after the image of corruptible things like men and animals, all of which perish and decay.

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

“Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness” – In Greek, the expression “gave them up” was a judicial term for handing a prisoner over to his sentence. In our courts today, once a defendant is found guilty, the judge has the bailiff turn the prisoner over to the proper authorities for incarceration. Because these people have rejected God, He has turned them over to their own uncleanness as punishment and allowed them to follow their sinful desires and reap the consequences of their sin.

“through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves” – The lusts (desires) of these people’s own hearts is what leads them into this uncleanness. The result is that the uncleanness of their hearts eventually manifests itself through how they dishonor their own bodies by committing fornication with one another. Since v. 23 refers to idolatry, Paul is likely talking about having sex with temple prostitutes (male and female) as part of worship in many religions of his time.

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

These people rejected the truth of God’s existence, that He created everything, and that He is worthy of all worship and glory and instead substituted their own gods, fashioned in the image of creatures that God Himself created. Thus they traded the truth for a lie. People are still doing this today in the name of “science,” claiming that the natural forces that God created are responsible for everything rather than God. Thus they have elevated nature as their god instead of worshiping the true God.

26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: 27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

“For this cause God gave them up unto vile [dishonorable; disgraceful] affections [passions; emotions]” – Just as in v. 24, as punishment God allows them to follow without hindrance their disgraceful passions and emotions to their destructive end.

“for even their women did change the natural [produced by nature; inborn] use [use of the body in sexual intercourse] into that which is against nature” – The Greek behind the words “natural use” indicate performing sexual acts according to how our bodies are naturally designed. One symptom of their rejection of God is lesbianism, which Paul describes here as being contrary to nature. God designed sex to operate between a man and a woman only.

“And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another” – Another result of God giving them “up unto vile affections” is that the men also ignored God’s design for sexual relationships and began having sexual desires for other men.

“men with men working that which is unseemly [indecent; shameful]” – Since homosexuality (as does lesbianism) involves indecent and shameful acts, Paul is using this particular sin as an example of the depths of sin to which people can sink if they reject God and rebel against His commands.

“and receiving in themselves that recompence [penalty] of their error which was meet [right or appropriate]” – Sin has natural consequences and those who reject and rebel against God will not escape the consequences of their sin. There are consequences in this life that are a direct result of sin and then there will be consequences after death when they are judged by God.

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

“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge [full knowledge]” – These people were not interested in learning about God and what He desires of them. They basically had no respect for God and His commands and thus ignored Him.

“God gave them over to a reprobate [unapproved; rejected] mind” – Because they rejected any involvement with Him, God “gave them over” to an unapproved mind. “Gave them over” is the same expression used in vs. 24 and 26 speaking of the punishment of allowing these people to continue in their error and reap the consequences. The Greek word for “reprobate” was typically used to describe metals and coins that were rejected because they had too many impurities to be used. The minds of these people are “unapproved” because they have rejected the truth and their ideas and beliefs are now based on faulty premises and lies.

“to do those things which are not convenient [fit; proper]” – The inevitable result when God has turned people who have rejected Him over to their own devices is that they will do that which is not proper. They will follow their own faulty reasoning and the eventual result will be sin and destruction.

29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, 30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:

Paul lists examples of the things that “are not convenient” that will permeate the lives of those with reprobate minds. We can see these behaviors on the news and on the streets of our cities today. It seems that people are more interested in doing what satisfies them than doing the right thing.

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

The Greek word for “knowing” implies a full knowledge. These people know full well that what they are doing is wrong. They understand that what they are doing is condemned by God and makes them worthy of death, and yet they continue to do these things in blatant rebellion against God. In addition to that, they love seeing others do the same. These people truly love their sin.