

Romans 1:18-32
January 18, 2015

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: When you hear the word “sin,” what comes to mind? [Listen for level of understanding]

Q: Why do you think we struggle with sin? [It’s part of our sin nature]

Sin is ugly. When we came out of our Mother’s womb, we were born with a sinful nature. That’s our default setting. When sin entered through Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the whole human race was infected with sin. So we have a natural bent or tendency toward sin. It’s something we fight every day. We live in a fallen world filled with fallen people. This is the essence of the doctrine of sin.

Not everyone subscribed to this, and Paul knew this when he wrote this letter to the Roman believers. Paul is going to paint a harsh picture of what sin looks like and the mindset behind it. He is not going to sugar-coat this. As you will recall, Paul opened his letter stating the theme to be about the *righteousness* of God, so Paul is getting ready to explain the *unrighteousness* of man.

The statement that we are a fallen people in a fallen world may sound obvious to you, but if you have ever tried to reach a lost person for Christ, you will understand why Paul is painstakingly going through this issue of sin. Unless a person sees themselves as a *sinner*, he can’t appreciate the gift of salvation that God offers him. I shared the gospel with a dear golfing buddy of mine who finally accepted the Lord after numerous meetings. In her joy she announced to her husband that she was saved. Her husband, an unbeliever, was incredulous and said, “Saved? You don’t sin.” There are people who are among us who simply don’t understand that they are infected with a sin condition and that God has provided a plan of salvation to deal with the penalty of sin.

Transition: All of us have a sin problem because it’s the affliction of the human race. Paul is going to start unpacking this problem by introducing us to the doctrine of general revelation. General revelation serves as a foundation to his introduction of what sin is! As we listen to Paul describe this in his own way, I believe *all of us can strengthen our understanding of the gospel message, specifically the doctrine of sin, BY identifying the CHARACTERISTICS of the sinful man*. We are looking for “characteristics” of the sinful man to strengthen our understanding of the doctrine sin. The ultimate goal is to be more effective in sharing the gospel with others by having a better handle on this part of the gospel message. Let’s begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Romans 1:18-23]

Observations/Process Qs-

V.18:

- The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

V.19:

- since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

V.20:

- For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

V.21:

- For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

V.22:

- Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools

V.23:

- and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Process Observations/Questions:

- **Q v.18:** Why is the wrath of God being revealed against all the godlessness and wickedness of men? [They are suppressing the truth that God gave them.]
- **Q v.19-20:** What truth has God made plain to all men? [God exists; His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen through His creation]
- **Q v.20:** Will anyone be able to stand before God and say, "I didn't know you existed." [NO! God is stating that "men are without excuse."]
- **Define General Revelation:** "The disclosure of God which is available to all human beings through the created universe (nature) and in the inner nature of human beings (conscience).
 - V.18 – This revelation has been made to all humankind. Thus = universal.
 - V.20a – Paul teaches that there is and has been a revelation of God through the created universe.
 - This revelation has existed since the creation of humankind and existed in Paul's day. Thus, this revelation was given not only to an unfallen Adam/Eve, but also to fallen humanity since Adam/Eve.
 - This revelation embraces "the eternal power and deity" of God.
 - V. 20c – This revelation carries with it a serious responsibility or accountability to one's response to it.
 - V.21-32 – This revelation has not been accepted and implemented, but rejected and corrupted by human beings.
 - Rom 2:14-16: Our conscience bears witness of a God who wrote the law on our hearts.
- **Define Special Revelation:** "The historical disclosure of God to the people of Israel and in Jesus Christ."
- **X-Ref Biblical Texts that support General Revelation:**
 - Ps 19:1-6 – The psalmist declares that the created universe embodies a manifestation or revelation of God.
 - Acts 14:17 – Paul suggests that some revelation of God in and through nature. It was not the power of the fertility gods that they received their food, but through the one, true God, "the controller of nature."

- Acts 17:26-28 – Paul proclaims God as Creator of all, not living in human shrines, but the Giver of life and breath to all humans (23-25). Paul was teaching that God created human beings so that they might seek and find Him and documented this human quest by quoting Stoic authors of the day.
- **Q:** What are the characteristics of the sinful man that you see in these verses? [godless, wicked, suppress the truth, didn't glorify God, didn't thank God, thinking became futile, foolish hearts were darkened, thought they were wise, exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images of animals or mortal man]
- **Q:** Let me hit the “pause” button here to check in with you. What questions or frustrations do you have with what you've read so far before we continue?

Summary: Paul has laid a significant foundation for all of us. He is saying that human history began with man knowing God and that man turned from the truth and rejected God. They didn't *want* to know God.

[Read Romans 1:24-32]

V.24:

- Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

V.25:

- They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

V.26:

- Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.

V.27:

- In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

V.28:

- Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.

V.29:

- They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,

V.30:

- slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;

V.31:

- they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless

V.32:

- Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Process Observations/Questions:

- **Observation v.24:** Notice that this verse starts with “therefore.” Paul is referencing v.18-23 that we just read.
- **Q v.24:** How does God deal with those who suppress the truth by their godlessness and wickedness? [He gives them over to their sinful desires for the degrading of their bodies. See NIV footnote.]
- **Observation:** The phrase “God gave them over” occurs three times in this section. [God acted to abandon (the thrice-mentioned “gave them over” [vv. 24, 26, 28] is *paredōken*, “abandoned”) people to expressions of a corrupt lifestyle that deserved God’s wrath and the sentence of death (v. 32).]
- **Q v.25:** The men exchanged the truth of God for a “lie.” What was the “lie?” [**The truth of God** is not only the truth concerning God but also God’s truth concerning all things, including mankind. This truth is that people are creatures of God and can find true fulfillment only in worshiping and obediently serving God **the Creator**. A lie (lit., “the lie”) on the other hand says that the creature—angelic (Isa. 14:13–14; John 8:44) or human (Gen. 3:4–5)—can exist independent of God, self-sufficient, self-directing, and self-fulfilling. Mankind made himself his god in place of the true God.]
- **Q v.26-27:** These verses tend to become a hot topic because it deals with homosexuality. Based on these verses, are homosexual behaviors affirmed by God? [No. The only natural sexual relationship the Bible recognizes is a heterosexual one (Gen. 2:21–24; Matt. 19:4–6) within marriage. This sin is repeatedly condemned in Scripture (Gen. 18:20ff; 1 Cor. 6:9–10; Jude 7). Paul characterizes it as “unnatural,” as well as “against nature.” Because of their sin “God gave them up” (Rom. 1:24, 26) which means that He permitted them to go on in their sins and reap the sad consequences. They received “in their own persons the due penalty of their error” (Rom. 1:27, NASB).]
- **Observation V.28:** Notice that “God gave them over” for the third time. The first time He gave them over to their “sinful desires;” the second time to their “shameful lusts;” and now to their “depraved minds.” Also note that Paul is reinforcing that these people had the knowledge of God but chose not to retain it.
- **Q V.28:** What is a “depraved” mind? [A mind that can’t form right judgments.]
- **Q V.29-32:** Finally, what characterizes wicked, evil and depraved people? [Paul names twenty-four specific sins, all of which are with us today. (For other lists, see Mark 7:20–23; Gal. 5:19–21; 1 Tim. 1:9–10; and 2 Tim. 3:2–5.)]

LOOK:

We were introduced the doctrine of general revelation as well as the doctrine of sin. There are two main points that you need to leave with today:

1. God has revealed Himself plainly such that we are without excuses to claim we didn’t know Him.
2. Sin begins as soon as we start suppressing the truth of God by choosing godlessness.

Keep in mind that these are people who were openly defiant of God. As Dan Crawford, a British missionary to Africa, said, “The heathen are sinning against a flood of light.”

Our part is to strengthen this area of the gospel message and remember that there is a desperate need to carry the Gospel to all men because this is the only way they will be saved!

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 518–520). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

WHEN GOD GIVES UP

Romans 1:18–3:20

Hear ye! Hear ye! Court is now in session!” Paul could have used those awesome words at this point in his letter, because Romans 1:18 is the door that leads us into God’s courtroom. The theme of Romans is the righteousness of God, but Paul had to begin with the *unrighteousness* of man. Until man knows he is a sinner, he cannot appreciate the gracious salvation God offers in Jesus Christ. Paul followed the basic Bible pattern: first Law and condemnation; then grace and salvation.

In this section, God makes three declarations that together prove that all men are sinners and need Jesus Christ.

The Gentile World Is Guilty! (Rom. 1:18–32)

The picture Paul paints here is an ugly one. I confess that there are some neighborhoods that I dislike driving through, and I avoid them if I can. My avoiding them does not change them or eliminate them. God’s description of sinners is not a pretty one, but we cannot avoid it. This section does not teach evolution (that man started low and climbed high), but *devolution*: he started high and, because of sin, sank lower than the beasts. Four stages mark man’s tragic devolution.

Intelligence (vv. 18–20). Human history began with man knowing God. Human history is not the story of a beast that worshiped idols, and then evolved into a man worshiping one God. Human history is just the opposite: man began knowing God, but turned from the truth and rejected God. God revealed Himself to man through creation, the things that He made. From the world around him, man knew that there was a God who had the wisdom to plan and the power to create. Man realized too that this Creator was eternal ... “His eternal power and Godhead” (Rom. 1:20), since God could not be created if He is the Creator. These facts about God are not hidden in creation; they are “clearly seen” (Rom. 1:20). “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork” (Ps. 19:1).

The word translated “hold” in Rom. 1:18 can also be translated “hold down, suppress.” Men knew the truth about God, but they did not allow this truth to work in their lives. They suppressed it in order that they might live their own lives and not be convicted by God’s truth. The result, of course, was refusing the truth (Rom. 1:21–22), and then turning the truth into a lie (Rom. 1:25). Finally, man so abandoned the truth that he became like a beast in his thinking and in his living.

Ignorance (vv. 21–23). Man knew God; this is clear. But man did not *want* to know God or honor Him as God. Instead of being thankful for all that God had given him, man refused to thank God or give Him the glory He deserves. Man was willing to use God’s gifts, but he was

not willing to worship and praise God for His gifts. The result was an empty mind and a darkened heart. Man the worshiper became man the philosopher, but his empty wisdom only revealed his foolishness. Paul summarized all of Greek history in one dramatic statement: “the times of this ignorance” (Acts 17:30). First Corinthians 1:18–31 is worth reading at this point.

Having held down God’s truth and refusing to acknowledge God’s glory, man was left without a god; and man is so constituted that he must worship something. If he will not worship the true God, he will worship a false god, *even if he has to manufacture it himself!* This fact about man accounts for his propensity to idolatry. Man exchanged the glory of the true God for substitute gods that he himself made. He exchanged glory for shame, incorruption for corruption, truth for lies.

Note that first on the list of false gods is *man*. This fulfilled Satan’s purpose when he told Eve, “Ye shall be as God!” (Gen. 3:5, NASB) “Glory to man in the highest!” Satan encouraged man to say. Instead of man being made in God’s image, man made gods in his own image—and then descended so low as to worship birds, beasts, and bugs!

Indulgence (vv. 24–27). From idolatry to immorality is just one short step. If man is his own god, then he can do whatever he pleases and fulfill his desires without fear of judgment. We reach the climax of man’s battle with God’s truth when man exchanges the truth of God for “the lie” and abandons truth completely. “The lie” is that man is his own god, and he should worship and serve himself and not the Creator. It was “the lie” Satan used in the Garden to lead Eve into sin: “Ye shall be as God!” Satan has always wanted the worship that belongs only to God (Isa. 14:12–15; Matt. 4:8–10); and in idolatry, he receives that worship (1 Cor. 10:19–21).

The result of this self-deification was self-indulgence; and here Paul mentions a vile sin that was rampant in that day and has become increasingly prevalent in our own day; homosexuality. This sin is repeatedly condemned in Scripture (Gen. 18:20ff; 1 Cor. 6:9–10; Jude 7). Paul characterizes it as “vile” and “unnatural,” as well as “against nature.” Not only were the men guilty, but “even the women.”

Because of their sin “God gave them up” (Rom. 1:24, 26) which means that He permitted them to go on in their sins and reap the sad consequences. They received “in their own persons the due penalty of their error” (Rom. 1:27, NASB). This is the meaning of Romans 1:18, “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven” (literal translation). God revealed His wrath, not by sending fire from heaven, but by abandoning sinful men to their lustful ways. But there was one more stage.

Impenitence (vv. 28–32). When man began to feel the tragic consequences of his sins, you would think he would repent and seek God; but just the opposite was true. Because he was abandoned by God, he could only become worse. Man did not even want to retain God in his knowledge! So, “God gave them over” this time to a “depraved mind” (Rom. 1:28, NASB), which means a mind that cannot form right judgments. They now abandoned themselves to sin. Paul names twenty-four specific sins, all of which are with us today. (For other lists, see Mark 7:20–23; Gal. 5:19–21; 1 Tim. 1:9–10; and 2 Tim. 3:2–5.)

But the worst is yet to come. Men not only committed these sins in open defiance of God, but encouraged others and applauded them when they sinned. How far man fell! He began glorifying God but ended exchanging that glory for idols. He began knowing God but ended refusing to keep the knowledge of God in his mind and heart. He began as the highest of God’s creatures, made in the image of God; but he ended lower than the beasts and insects, because he worshiped them as his gods. The verdict? “They are without excuse!” (Rom. 1:20)

This portion of Scripture gives ample proof that the heathen are lost. Dan Crawford, British missionary to Africa, said: “The heathen are sinning against a flood of light.” There is a desperate need for us to carry the Gospel to all men, for this is the only way they can be saved.

Witmer, J. A. (1985). Romans. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 441–445). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

A. *Condemnation against pagan humanity (1:18–32)*

This section looks at the human race prior to the call of Abram and the establishment of a special people of God. This situation persisted in the pagan world of the Gentiles as distinct from the Jews.

1. REASONS FOR CONDEMNATION (1:18–23)

God never condemns without just cause. Here three bases are stated for His judgment of the pagan world.

a. *For suppressing God’s truth (1:18).*

1:18. This verse serves as a topic sentence for this entire section. In addition, it stands in contrastive parallel to verse 17. The continuing revelation (the verb **is being revealed** is in the pres. tense) of **the wrath of God** is an expression of His personal righteousness (which also “is being revealed,” Gr., v. 17) and its opposition to human sinfulness. Therefore people need the continuing revelation of “a righteousness from God” (v. 17) that He provides. God’s wrath **is** directed **against all the godlessness** (*asebeian*, “lack of proper reverence for God”) **and wickedness** (*adikian*, “unrighteousness”) **of men**, not against the men as such. (God’s wrath will also be revealed in the future; cf. 2:5.) God hates sin and judges it, but loves sinners and desires their salvation.

Failure to give God His due inevitably results in failure to treat people, created by God in His image, the right way. Conversely, people (in their unrighteousness toward others) continue to **suppress** (*katechontōn*, lit., “holding down”) **the truth** (cf. 1:25; 2:8) concerning both God and man. People had God’s truth but suppressed it, refusing to heed it. And these wicked ones did this in an attitude of **wickedness** (*en adikia*). This suppression of the truth is Paul’s first reason for God’s condemnation of the pagan world.

b. *For ignoring God’s revelation (1:19–20)*

These verses declare that knowledge concerning God is available to all. This knowledge is called natural revelation because it is seen in the created world, is accessible to the entire human race, and is not soteriological, dealing with salvation effected by Christ.

1:19. Paul called this knowledge **plain** (*phaneron*), which means visible or clear. This is true **because God has made it plain** (*ephanerōsen*, the verb related to the noun *phaneron*). Some scholars translate the phrase **to them** as “in them,” insisting that verse 19 is speaking of the knowledge of God within the being of man through conscience and religious consciousness. Preferable is the position that verse 19 states the fact of natural revelation and verse 20 explains

the process. One support for this view is the word “for” which begins verse 20 and indicates a tie between the verses.

1:20. “What may be known about God” (v. 19) is now called **God’s invisible qualities** and identified as **His eternal power and divine nature**. Since “God is spirit” (John 4:24), all His qualities are invisible to physical eyes and can be **understood** by the human mind only as they are reflected in **what has been made**, that is, in God’s creative work. The self-existent God, however, is the Creator of all things, and therefore **since the Creation of the world** His “invisible qualities” **have been clearly seen**. Paul may have intended a play on words between the noun translated “invisible qualities” (*aorata*) and the verb translated “clearly seen” (*kathoratai*) because they share a common Greek root. Both the verb “clearly seen” and the participle “being understood” are in the present tense, which emphasizes the continuous nature of the action. The word *theiotēs*, translated “divine nature,” occurs only here in the New Testament and embraces the properties which make God God. Creation, which people see, reveals God’s unseen character—the all-powerful Deity. An Old Testament parallel to these verses is Psalm 19:1–6.

Paul’s conclusion to this description of natural revelation is important—**men are without excuse**. The witness to God in nature is so clear and so constant that ignoring it is indefensible. Their condemnation is based not on their rejecting Christ of whom they have not heard, but on their sinning against the light they have.

c. For perverting God’s glory (1:21–23).

1:21. This reason for God’s condemnation of the pagan world builds on the preceding one just as that one built on the first. The relationship is seen in the use of the same Greek connective (*dioti*) at the beginning of verses 19 and 21, in the latter translated **for**. People’s suppression of the truth is seen in their rejecting the clear evidence of God as the sovereign Creator and their perversion of that knowledge into idolatry.

The clause **although they knew God** refers to an original experiential knowledge of God such as Adam and Eve had both before and after the Fall. How long this knowledge of God continued before it was perverted is not stated, but God was known by people. This fact makes human actions all the more reprehensible. One would suppose that to know God would be to honor Him, but these people **neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him**. They turned from the very purpose for which God made them: to glorify Him for His Person and thank Him for His works. With such willful rebellion against God it is little wonder that **their thinking became futile** (*emataiōthēsan*, lit., “became worthless, purposeless”; cf. Eph. 4:17) **and their foolish** (*asynetos*, “morally senseless”; cf. Rom. 1:31) **hearts were darkened** (cf. Eph. 4:18). When truth is rejected, in time the ability to recognize and to receive truth is impaired (cf. John 3:19–20).

1:22–23. When the true Source of wisdom is rejected (cf. Ps. 111:10), people’s claim **to be wise** is an idle boast. Progressively **they became fools** (*emōranthēsan*, lit., “became stupid”), a reality demonstrated by the worship as gods of idols in the forms of people **and animals** (cf. Rom. 1:25). The ultimate irony in humanity’s refusal to glorify the true **God** is the insanity or stupidity of idolatry described in Isaiah 44:9–20. Man’s refusal to acknowledge and glorify God leads to a downward path: first, worthless thinking; next, moral insensitivity; and then, religious stupidity (seen in idol-worship).

2. RESULTS OF CONDEMNATION (1:24–32)

In a real sense the results of God’s condemnation on rebellious humanity are nothing more than the natural consequences of suppressing truth, ignoring revelation, and perverting God’s glory. However, God did more than simply let nature take its course. God acted to abandon (the thrice-mentioned “gave them over” [vv. 24, 26, 28] is *paredōken*, “abandoned”) people to expressions of a corrupt lifestyle that deserved God’s wrath and the sentence of death (v. 32).

a. *Abandoned to fornication (1:24–25).*

1:24. One aspect of mankind’s corruption (to which **God** actively let people go) was **sexual profligacy**. The frequency of live-in lovers, wife-swapping, and group sex parties today only confirms this result of God’s abandonment. Sex within marriage is a holy gift from God, but otherwise sex is **impurity** (lit., “uncleanness”) and **the degrading of ... bodies** by using them contrary to God’s intent.

1:25. In a sense this verse repeats the truth of verse 23, but it expresses more. **The truth of God** is not only the truth concerning God but also God’s truth concerning all things, including mankind. This truth is that people are creatures of God and can find true fulfillment only in worshiping and obediently serving God **the Creator**. **A lie** (lit., “the lie”) on the other hand says that the creature—angelic (Isa. 14:13–14; John 8:44) or human (Gen. 3:4–5)—can exist independent of God, self-sufficient, self-directing, and self-fulfilling. Mankind made himself his god in place of the true God. Because God the Creator **is forever praised** (in contrast with creatures who are undeserving of worship), Paul added **Amen**. This word transliterates in both Greek and English the Hebrew word meaning “so let it be.” As an affirmation, not a wish, it places approval on what has just been said (cf. comments on 2 Cor. 1:20).

b. *Abandoned to sexual perversion (1:26–27).*

1:26–27. Also **God gave them over to shameful lusts** (lit., “passions of disgrace”). This involved, as the text states, both sexes engaging in homosexual instead of heterosexual relationships. **Women** deliberately **exchanged natural relations** (with men in marriage) **for unnatural ones** (with other women). This is the second “exchange” the unregenerate made (cf. v. 25). **Men ... were inflamed with lust** (*orexei*, “sexual lust,” used only here in the NT and differing from the more common word for lust in v. 26).

The words translated **women** and **men** in these verses are the sexual words “females” and “males.” Contemporary homosexuals insist that these verses mean that it is perverse for a heterosexual male or female to engage in homosexual relations but it is not perverse for a homosexual male or female to do so since homosexuality is such a person’s natural preference. This is strained exegesis unsupported by the Bible. The only natural sexual relationship the Bible recognizes is a heterosexual one (Gen. 2:21–24; Matt. 19:4–6) within marriage. All homosexual relations constitute sexual **perversion** and are subject to God’s judgment. Such lustful and **indecent acts** have within them the seeds of punishment (**due penalty**).

c. *Abandoned to depraved lifestyle (1:28–32).*

1:28. Pagan humanity’s rebellion also included the rejection of **the knowledge** (*epignōsei*, “full knowledge”; cf. v. 32) **of God**. In a sense they put God out of their minds. God’s

responding judgment was abandonment (cf. vv. 24, 26) **to a depraved** (*adokimon*, “disapproved”) **mind**, which expressed itself in attitudes and actions that **ought not to be done** (lit., “what is unfitting or improper,” a technical Stoic word).

1:29–31. The mental vacuum created by dismissing God was **filled** (the perf. tense implies filled full) **with** four forms of active sin: **wickedness** (*adikia*; cf. v. 18), **evil** (*ponēria*), **greed, and depravity** (*kakia*, “badness or malice”). These four in turn express themselves in 17 more specific types of wickedness. The first two, **envy** and **murder**, sound much alike in Greek: *phthonou* and *phonou*. Also the four vices in verse 31 each begin with the Greek letter alpha (“a” in Eng.).

1:32. This whole pattern of evil becomes the lifestyle of people who **continue to do** (pres. tense implies continuing or habitual action) **these very things** in open defiance of God, a defiance aggravated (a) by fully knowing (*epignontes*; cf. v. 28) that **such things deserve death** and (b) by encouraging others in the same lifestyle. Such extremity of human rebellion against God fully warrants **God’s** condemnation.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (p. 1682). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

1:18 God’s wrath is not an uncontrollable, destructive emotion directed against those God dislikes. Wrath describes His just, holy response to sin and rebellion. From human perspective shaped in a world permeated by sin and injustice, wrath and love are seen as polar opposites. In God, however, there is no conflict between His great love and His terrible wrath. Most human beings know that something is wrong with the world, and there is a deep longing that it be put right. The multiplicity of religions and sects give a variety of explanations of why the world isn’t as it should be. They also prescribe a variety of logically incompatible solutions to right the wrongs. Both God’s love and His wrath are the guarantors that what is wrong will be put right. To deny or minimize God’s wrath is to obscure what He revealed in the death of His Son who bore God’s wrath in our place.

1:20 Is everyone really without excuse? What about remote tribal people who never hear the gospel? This seems unduly harsh, doesn’t it? Paul was clear that no one can claim ignorance of God’s existence and power. Why? God has clearly revealed many of His attributes in the natural world, enough for people to respond in some manner. Certainly people cannot know all there is to know about God from nature. However, they can know enough for God to hold them accountable for responding to this knowledge. Paul affirmed that God will render just judgment to each person according to whatever light that person received—whether natural revelation, the Jewish law, or the gospel of Christ. No Scripture hints of a second chance to trust in Christ after death; equally, the NT is clear that salvation resides solely in Christ (Jn 14:6; Acts 4:12). If God is willing to go to such great lengths to reveal Himself and rescue us from sin, then surely we can be confident of His just, loving attitude toward the unevangelized.

1:24 Does God cause people to sin? At some point He may “deliver them over” to their sinful choices, giving them what they want (cp. also vv. 26, 28). They abandon God’s ways, and He abandons them, further intensifying their awful condition.

1:26–27 Is homosexuality wrong? Paul appealed to what is “natural” (*physis*—used in 2:27; 11:21, 24; Gl 2:15) to contrast *natural* sexual relations—men with women with same-sex acts.

His reasoning is not solely biological, however. Rather, the problem is people abandoning God's created order—the topic in this context (v. 20). Those engaging in homosexuality are not simply abandoning what is “natural,” biologically speaking; they are rejecting the way God intended all of His creation to operate. Paul was not discussing pederastic or homosexual acts merely in connection with idol worship (cp. 1 Co 6:9–11), but instead was saying that human beings are created for natural, heterosexual relationships—the only kind of sexual relationships the Bible recognizes as acceptable.

These verses clearly show that homosexuality is not “natural” but instead is “unnatural” and “shameless.” Paul wrote in 1 Co 6:9 that practicing homosexuals, along with sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, thieves, greedy people, drunkards, revilers, or swindlers will not enter the kingdom of God. Paul went on to say, “Some of you were like this; but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Co 6:11).

What Happens to a Person Who Has Never Heard of Jesus? Part Two of Two

As noted in yesterday's Daily e-Truth, people are not condemned to hell for not believing in Jesus whom they have never heard of. Rather they are already condemned because of their sin (Romans 3:9–18, 23).

Furthermore, if ignorance were a ticket to heaven, the greatest evangelistic enterprise would not be a Billy Graham crusade but a concerted cover-up campaign. Such a campaign would focus on ending evangelism, burning Bibles, and closing churches. Soon no one would have heard of Christ and everyone would be on their way to heaven. This argument, popularly referred to as the argumentum ad absurdum, or the argument to a logical absurdity, underscores the reality that a claim to ignorance is hardly a ticket to heaven. Only if one is truly blind would he or she be absolved of sin (John 9:41).

Finally, it is hard to claim genuine blindness in light of creation and conscience (Romans 1:18–20; 2:14–15). God is not capricious! If we respond to the light, he will give us more light. In the words of the apostle Paul, "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26–27 NIV1984).

Hank Hanegraaff's Daily e-Truth is adapted from my book, *AfterLife: What You Need to Know about Heaven, the Hereafter, and Near-Death Experiences*