

The Epistle of Paul to the *Romans*

Theme of Romans (1:16-17)

1:16-17 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness from God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” Paul’s announcement that he was “not ashamed of the gospel” ^{2 Timothy 1:8} was an understatement at the time of his writing. Paul was stoned in Galatia ^{Acts 14:19}, beaten/imprisoned in Philippi ^{Acts 16:22-24} and smuggled out of Berea ^{Acts 17:13-14}, all because of his passion for Jesus and His gospel ^{1 Corinthians 15:1-4}. However, prior to conversion ^{Acts 9:1-18}, Paul hated and passionately battled Christians and the gospel by attempting to eliminate all of the “followers of the way” ^{Acts 8:3, 22:4-5}.

These verses embody the theme of the book of Romans:

God's desire and ability to grant salvation to all who, through faith, embrace His gospel.

Power is from the Greek word, *dynamis*, that is the origin of the English word “dynamite”.

Salvation is translated from the Greek word (*sōtēria*) meaning “deliverance” or “rescue”.

God’s message of salvation came “from the Jews” ^{John 4:22}, starting with Abraham ^{Genesis 12:1-3} and Moses ^{Exodus 19:6}. When Jesus first came, His ministry was for the Jews ^{Matthew 15:24}; to wake them up and bring them the New Covenant. Jesus trained His apostles/disciples so they could take the message to the rest of the world ^{Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:7-8}, and specifically He tasked Paul with carrying His “name before the Gentiles and their kings” ^{Acts 9:15}.

Paul’s inclusion of “The righteous will live by faith.” ^{Habakkuk 2:4} is one of three times this OT verse is quoted in the NT. Paul used the phrase twice ^{v.17, Galatians 3:11} to emphasize the necessity of faith for salvation (righteousness) ^{Philippians 3:9} and once ^{Hebrews 10:38} to illustrate that faith is essential for sanctification (perseverance). God is the same in the OT and NT.

Condemnation: The Need for God's Righteousness (1:18 - 3:20)

Following his introduction of the “righteousness from God” ^{v.17} (a concept he will later develop at length ^{Romans 3:21-5:21}), Paul presented the evidence of man’s sinfulness and his need for God’s righteousness. He addressed the unrighteousness (wickedness) of three people groups: (1) Gentiles (pagans) ^{v.18-32}, (2) Jews ^{Romans 2:1-3:8}, and (3) mankind ^{Romans 3:9-20}.

Unrighteous Gentiles (1:18-32)

The next 6 verses define the three *Gentile* (pagan) actions which justify *God's* judgement:

1. They suppress *God's* truth ^{v.18}
2. They ignore *God's* revelation ^{v.19-20}
3. They pervert *God's* glory ^{v.21-23}

1:18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness...

The "wrath of God" is not an impulsive outburst of anger, but a determined response of a righteous God against unrepentant sin ^{Jeremiah 25:15-16, John 3:36, Colossians 3:5-6}. The revelation of His wrath is an ongoing process, including specific manifestations throughout time (e.g., the Flood, Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus on the cross, etc). One of the behavioral characteristics provoking God's wrath is when man chooses to "suppress the truth". This behavior is the consequence of "men [loving] darkness instead of light" ^{John 3:19-20}.

Paul is subtle in indicating "God's wrath" is directed more at the sin ^{Proverbs 8:13} than at man. The Lord loves the people He "knit together" ^{Psalms 139:13} and "crowned with glory" ^{Psalms 8:5}; however, when man chooses to live a life of sin, he will receive the wrath of God ^{Romans 2:5}.

The word "godlessness" is a word (*asebeia*) meaning a lack of proper reverence for God.

The word "wickedness" (unrighteousness) is a word (*adikia*) meaning a lack of conformity in thought, word and deed to the character and law of God, resulting from godlessness.

1:19-20 ...since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 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.

The knowledge of God is "plain to [the wicked]", because all are made in the "image of God" ^{Genesis 1:26-27}, with a God-revealing conscience ^{Romans 2:15}. In addition to man's inherent knowledge of God, His "invisible qualities" (His "eternal power" and "divine nature") are gloriously revealed through His creation ^{Job 12:7-10, Acts 14:15, 17:24-28}. Everyone has opportunities to respond to God and His truth and will be "without excuse" at the time of judgement ^{Revelation 20:11-15}. Even when a person has never heard the gospel, God has provided or will provide many opportunities for them to either learn about the gospel ^{Acts 8:26-39, 10:1-48} or enough truth for them to make a conscious decision whether

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to embrace or reject Him, because God "is not far from any one of us" Acts 17:27. However, the wicked willingly exhibit the 2nd behavioral trait: ignoring the irrefutable revelation of God.

Paul included an interesting play on words, writing "invisible qualities" being "clearly seen". This could only be accomplished with an actual Creator God who has fashioned everything from a single living cell up to the vast cosmos, and all with an undeniable design Psalm 19:1-6. Nothing but hopelessness is left for those who reject the reality of God's glory Proverbs 11:7.

1:21-23 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. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. As emphasized in notes above, the unrighteous "[know] God", but they refuse to glorify Psalm 148, Romans 15:5-6 their creator as God requires 1 Corinthians 10:31, as well as not "[giving] thanks" for everything He does Psalm 107:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:18. Man's efforts to find meaning and significance are empty and "futile", because they foolishly 1 Corinthians 1:20 search in darkness John 3:19-20, Ephesians 4:18 to find help from worthless idols of created beings Deuteronomy 4:15-18 made by man Acts 17:29. As illustrated in these verses, the third behavioral characteristic is perverting God's glory.

Anything you love more, fear more, serve more or value more than God is your idol. (Adrian Rogers)

Curiously, the Bible pronounces: "those who make [idols] will be like them" Psalm 115:8, 135:18.

This phrase proclaims that the idol and the idol worshipper are both spiritually worthless.

Historians report that many ancient cultures did not originally have idols. For example, Persia Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1:31, Rome Varro in Augustine, *The City of God*, 4:31, and even Greece and Egypt Lucian, *The Syrian Goddess*, 34 had no idolatry at their founding. In addition, the fourth century historian Eusebius reported that the oldest civilizations had no idols. The earliest Biblical record of idolatry was among Abram's family "beyond the river" Joshua 24:2 (in Ur).

The rest of this chapter v.24-32 describes the tragic results of the above behaviors v.18-23.

1:24-25 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised.

Amen. When a wicked person consistently abandons God, God (at a time of His choosing) will abandon them, leaving them to their life of sin Judges 10:13-14, Psalm 81:11-12, Acts 7:38-42a and

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eventually their destruction ^{Jeremiah 13:24-25}. The phrase "a lie" should be translated "the lie". The foundational lie of Satan, the "father of lies" ^{John 8:44}, is: man can exist independently from God ^{Genesis 3:4-5}, being self-sufficient ^{John 15:5}, self-fulfilling (humanism ⇒ man is god).

Paul used the phrase "gave them over" ^{v.24,26,28} (*paradidōmi*), which was a Greek judicial term that referred to the handing over of a prisoner so his sentence could be carried out.

1:26-27 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 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. Paul expanded on the earlier concept of abandonment ^{v.24-25}, by emphasizing the depravity of sexual perversion, specifically the vile sin of homosexuality ^{Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10}.

The ultimate "due penalty" of unrepentant homosexuality (as it is with any unrepentant sin) is eternal separation from God (the "second death" ^{Revelation 21:8}). However, the pestilence of AIDs may well be an earthly form of God's "penalty" on those who defiantly choose the unnatural behavior of homosexuality (man redefining God's definition of appropriate sex).

1:28-32 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. 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, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 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. Paul concluded his discussion of wicked behavior with the last restatements of (1) the consequence of persistent, unrepentant sinful acts: God "will [give] them over" to a "depraved mind", (2) a list of the most detestable conduct to God (one of the numerous Biblical lists ^{1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Galatians 5:19-21, Colossians 3:5, Revelation 9:20-21,21:8,22:15}) and (3) the fact that all people "know God's righteous decree", resulting in their awareness that evil practices "deserve death" ^{Romans 6:23}. Paul concluded by equating the resulting punishment for both doing ^{John 8:24, James 1:15} and encouraging ^{Matthew 18:6} sin.

Do you think the rampant, despicable immorality implies God has "turned [America] over" ?