

Abounding Grace Christian Church

A Study through the Epistle to the Romans – Part 5

I. Exposition of Chapter One (Continued).

A. Verses 18-32 – Righteousness needed by the Gentiles.

1. **Verses 26-27** – In order to give an example of mankind’s devolution into sin and their exchanging the truth of God for a lie, here Paul talks about one of the more shameful and abnormal forms of immorality that has ever been committed - **homosexuality**. Homosexuality is one example of life apart from God’s obvious will in creation. It was and is considered sin and has caused major cultural problems both in the past and the present (cf. **Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; I Corinthians 6:9; I Timothy 1:10**).

2. **Verse 26 - “vile passions”** – The word “vile” is the noun form of the word translated “dishonor” in **verse 24**. The word means; “dishonorable” and “disgraceful”. Other translations include: **“For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions...” – English Standard Version.**

“This is why God delivered them over to degrading passions...” – Holman Christian Standard Bible.

3. **“For even the women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.”** – The word **“exchanged”** is used only in this verse and in **verse 25** in the New Testament and means **“to cease one activity and to start something else in exchange”**. If we were to compare these verses, in **verse 25** it is **“...exchanging the truth of God for a lie”** and here it is **“...exchanged the natural use (the truth of God) for what is against nature (a lie)**. It denotes the giving up of one thing (the natural function of the woman, heterosexuality and child bearing) in order to receive another (the lie of lesbianism). Women became lesbians, practicing unnatural sex and knowing no shame.

a. Paul probably mentions women first in order to emphasize the severity of the fallenness of humanity. In most societies and cultures, women are the last to fall into homosexuality and other immorality.

4. **Verse 27 – “Likewise also the men...”** – Just as the previous verse is most definitely referring to lesbianism, this verse is referring most definitely to homosexual men.

a. It’s important to remember that Paul is writing to a culture where homosexuality was accepted as a part of life for both men and women. For some 200 years, men who openly practiced homosexuality, often with young boys, ruled the Roman Empire.¹

b. **“...leaving the natural use of the woman...”** – Again, we see the emphasis of what is natural. Homosexuality is unnatural and, therefore carries with it a penalty. When you use your body in a way that is contrary to the way it was designed you do damage.

c. **“...burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which is due.”**

1) Paul speaks of a penalty for homosexual conduct; Homosexuality has within itself a penalty. This speaks of the self-destructive nature of sin; it often carries within itself its own penalty. There is a penalty or due retribution for going against God’s natural laws. There is spiritual, emotional, physical and relational damage that takes place.

2) Sometimes it is the penalty of rebellion, resulting in spiritual emptiness and all its ramifications. The term “gay” is wishful thinking; it sends a message that there is something essentially happy and carefree about the homosexual lifestyle - which there is not.

3) Sin is not just something I do, it’s something I do to ME!! (cf. **I Corinthians 6:15-20; Galatians 6:7-8**).

5. **Verse 28 – “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;”**

¹The Roman Emperor, Nero at one point took a young boy and had him castrated and then went through an actual wedding ceremony with him and called him his “wife”. <http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/9985571743.html>

- a. As further judgment, God gives man over to a **“debased mind”**. The word **“debased”** was used to describe a counterfeit coin that fell below the standard weight. The basic meaning is that of not standing the test or failing to meet the test and hence worthless, base or unqualified. It was the term commonly used of metals that were rejected by refiners because of impurities. The impure metals were discarded, so, therefore, it came to include the ideas of worthlessness and uselessness. Vincent notes that **“There is a play upon the words. As they did not approve, God gave them up unto a mind disapproved.”**²

6. Verses 29-31 – List of Sins.

- a. **“Unrighteousness”** — Means **“injustice.”**
- b. **“Sexual immorality”** — All sexual relations outside the bonds of lawful marriage.
- c. **“Wickedness”** — A deliberate desire to hurt others. It will use any method to gain selfish ends.
- d. **“Covetousness”** — Greedy grasping after more, with a strong desire to outdo others.
- e. **“Maliciousness”** — Evil intent toward other people.
- f. **“Envy”** — A resentful spirit toward another person’s success. It is jealousy of another person who has more or does better than oneself. We don’t envy our inferiors.
- g. **“Murder”** — The violent taking of human life, including the spirit of anger and hatred that leads to it.
- h. **“Strife”** — Contention, strife, quarrelling.
- i. **“Deceit”** — Fraud and trickery
- j. **“Evil mindedness”** — The spirit that always supposes the worst about other people. Always puts a bad construction on what they say and do.
- k. **“Whisperers”** — Gossips or talebearers.
- l. **“Backbiters”** — Slanderers and false accusers who delight in smearing the reputations and characters of others.
- m. **“Haters of God”** — Scorners, atheists, etc.
- n. **“Violent”** — Abusing others and enjoying it. Show no respect for the dignity of human personality.
- o. **“Proud”** — Self-conceited, arrogant.
- p. **“Boasters”** — Braggarts, swaggerers, those who are constantly telling all the great things they have done.
- q. **“Inventors of evil things”** — Not content with the usual ways of sinning, but seek to find some new ways to sin, defraud, and injure others.
- r. **“Disobedient to parents”** — Failure to show parents the respect and honor that is due them. It implies dishonor to the Heavenly Father Himself.
- s. **“Undiscerning”** — Unable to reason to a sane, Scriptural conclusion in spiritual matters. Also describes one who never learns the lessons of experience, but continues on in his folly.
- t. **“Untrustworthy”** — Lightly casts aside the obligation contained in contracts and agreements, both in business and in marriage. This, of course, prevents the possibility of honor and trust in human relations.
- u. **“Unloving”** — A lack of love even for one’s own flesh and blood. It describes parents and children who abandon or betray their own families whenever it seems expedient.
- v. **“Unforgiving”** — Those who are unwilling to forgive, and who refuse to be reconciled either to God or man. These people are UNREACHABLE by any kindness shown to them.
- w. **“Unmerciful”** — A lack of compassion toward the unfortunate, downtrodden, or sick person. It’s a “wolf pack” attitude. These people appear incapable of showing mercy.³

7. **Verse 32** - Paul concludes this list by summing up everything he has written from verse 18 to verse 31. He says that those who are guilty of these, commit them with the full knowledge that the ultimate penalty is **“death,”**

²Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1887), 21.

³Adapted from William C. Neece, *Study Notes on the Book of Romans* (James L. Fleming, 2005), Ro 1:18–32.