

“Idoltrous Thinking and Living Exposed” - Romans 1:18-32

Author: Paul the apostle (a Roman citizen by birth), born to proclaim God’s gospel (Gal 1:15-17).

Date/Provenance: Late 50s AD (58-59?). Written from Corinth on third missionary journey (Acts 20:2-3, Rom 15:25-29, 16:1, 23, 1 Cor 1:14) with help of Amanuensis Tertius (Rom 16:22). Paul is hoping to visit soon (Rom 1:10, 16:22-33). He *will* visit Rome, but not to preach as planned (Paul will have two later imprisonments in Rome and is martyred in the second, see 2 Tim 4:6-8).

Circumstances: The Church in Rome consisted of both Jew and Gentiles – scholars argue about which group was larger, but Paul clearly addresses both groups (e.g., Rom 2:17, 11:13). Although the Roman church is not mentioned in Acts, many saw Pentecost (Acts 2) and returned to their homes...

Purpose: Paul wants to exhort w/full-orbed gospel, correct errors concerning it. Romans is Paul’s “Magnum Opus” (R.C. Sproul), the longest/most systematic explanation of God’s gospel (1:16-17).

18-20 – The wrath of God is “revealed” (emphasized by being the first word in the Greek text) against the sinfulness of *all people* (cf. Rom 3:10, 3:23) b/c of the knowledge of God from creation is “clearly seen” (v20) but sinfully disregarded (v18) – causing futile thinking & living (Jer 17:9, Eph 4:17-23, v21, v28).

- Humanity’s problem is *not* a lack of evidence. Literally all of creation bears witness to God’s existence (Ps 8, Col 1:16-17, Rom 11:36) *and* what He is like (Ps 8, 19:1-2, v19-20). Since all human beings know they have offended a holy God, they can only “suppress the truth” (v18) that they *do* know, because God *has* made Himself known to everyone, even remote tribes (v19).
- App: Because of the effects of sin on the mind, reasoning must be blessed by the Holy Spirit for anyone to believe (Ezek 11:9, 36:26, Mt 18:3, Jn 3:3, 1 Cor 2:14). Yet this is foundational for apologetics: Unbelievers live in God’s world and do know about the One they claim to reject!

21-23 – In all idolatry, the truth is exchanged for a lie. Idols provide a false hope of providing control over creation, but always leave human beings powerless and unsatisfied (Ps 115:4-8, Prov 9:13-18, Eccl 2:1-11, Isa 44:6-8, Jonah 2:8-9, Hab 2:18, Mt 6:19-24, 1 Cor 8:4-6, 10:14, 1 Jn 5:21). App: Physical/heart idolatry.

24-27 – Paul brings up the practical fruit of an idolatrous lifestyle: sexual sin and all sorts of evil (v29-32). But when He mentions God in the same breath, he goes out of his way to proclaim the holiness and excellence of His name (Ps 86:10, 1 Jn 1:5, Rev 4:8). Rejecting God’s intention for human sexuality (Gen 2:18-24) *distorts* but cannot eradicate the image of God in mankind (Gen 1:26-27, 1 Cor 3:18).

- App: There are attempts to remove or twist the application of this text to make it irrelevant to modern readers. Yet this is not just Paul’s opinion for those back in Rome. What all of Scripture and Jesus Himself says about marriage, sexuality and gender is *clear* and not only for the ancient world (Lev 18:22, 20:13, Mt 10:14-15, Mk 10:6-9, 1 Cor 6:9-10, 7:2, 1 Tim 1:8-11, Jude 1:7).

28 – God “gives over” people to their own lusts as a judgment (Ps 81:11-12), but He also “gives” His son for all who trust in the hope of the gospel and will trust in Him, repenting of their sin (Rom 8:32, 1 Cor 6:11).

- Those who practice sin approve of others doing the same...darkness loves darkness (John 3:19).
- App: To be saved, you *must* not only see our corrupt society in Paul’s list of sins but *yourself* as justly deserving condemnation from God’s revelation in His creation. Religious people are not exempted (Lk 18:9-14), though Paul has specific arguments for those who possess the light of God’s Word in chapter 2 as he marches towards the ultimate point that all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory (Rom 2:8, 3:10, 3:23). Remember, God’s gospel is powerful to save from this bad news about His wrath and is held out to both Jew and Gentile from every class, background and ethnicity (Rom 1:16-17).