

# A Study in Romans

## Camelback

### Introduction

Some information about the book:

- The church was a mixed community of Jewish and Gentile believers. The Jews had been banned from Rome by Emperor Claudius in 49, due to some disturbances over Jews preaching about Jesus as Messiah. The church turned exclusively Gentile for several years and then making them the dominant group, even after Claudius died in 54 and the Jewish believers returned. This reintegration may have caused some of the tensions addressed by Paul.
- Emperor Nero began to rule in 54. During his reign he called for the execution of many Christians, accusing them of starting the great fire in the city in 64. While we do not have an exact date, it is possible that this is when both Paul and Peter were martyred.
- Paul spent three months in Corinth (see Acts 20:3) toward the end of AD 56. He then began his final trip to Jerusalem in the spring of 57. It appears that when he wrote this letter, the funds he gathered for the Jerusalem church had been collected (Rom 15:26–28). This indicates a period from late 56 through early 57 for the writing of the letter.
- There are fewer personal references about himself and his readers in Romans than in his letters to the Corinthians and Galatians. This is likely because he did not plant the churches there, nor did he provide guidance as they grew to maturity as he had others. Yet almost assuredly the people were familiar with Paul since Priscilla, Aquila, and others (16:3–15) who lived in Rome had labored with him, as he mentions in his closing regards.
- The central themes to Paul's theology are twofold. First, we see a clear emphasis on justification by faith. Second, we also find that our life "in Christ" is essential for lifting one out of the dryness of a theoretical belief into a dynamic relationship with Jesus.

NOTE: In our study, we do not have the time to investigate every word/phrase of each verse. Many of these words/phrases appear several times throughout the book. When they become a prominent theme in a specific passage, we will take time to explore it more fully.

### Chapter 1

#### *Greeting*

(Romans 1:1–7)<sup>1</sup> Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated to the gospel of God<sup>2</sup> which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,<sup>3</sup> concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,<sup>4</sup> and declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.<sup>5</sup> Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name,<sup>6</sup> among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;<sup>7</sup> to all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

### ***(1) “a bondservant of Jesus Christ”***

Moses, Joshua, David, and others are referred to as “servants of the Lord.” It is a reference to all those who consider the Lord as their Master, guiding in all that they did in life.

David wrote a psalm about God’s servants:

(Psalm 134:1–3) <sup>1</sup> Behold, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD, who by night stand in the house of the LORD! <sup>2</sup> Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD. <sup>3</sup> The LORD who made heaven and earth bless you from Zion!

The reference to standing “in the house of the Lord” points to the activity of the larger worshipping community, not just the Levites or priests.

This is how the prophet Isaiah referred to God’s servants:

(Isaiah 54:17) 17 No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is from Me,” says the LORD.

We also find a similar term in the book of Revelation, calling them “prophets” because they are sent to proclaim His end time message:

(Revelation 11:18) The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth.”

### ***(1) “called to be an apostle”***

Paul points to his office and its authority in the opening of his letter. He was appointed by Jesus Himself to represent Him. But maybe the most important point he is making has to do with his purpose. He was “separated to the gospel of God.” This is his purpose and focus, consuming all his time and energy.

As noted above, Paul is echoing the calling of the prophets of the Old Testament. His message is part of a long line of messengers who are called to proclaim the gospel in their day.

### ***(3) “His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh”***

In the same manner as in Acts 13:33–35, Paul identifies three key things: the Sonship of the Messiah, His relation to David, and His resurrection from the dead.

Paul writes about the existence of Christ in two stages. He is both the eternal One equal to the Father (deity) yet human by His incarnation (mankind). In chapter 8, Paul writes that the Father “sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (8:3).

We can understand his reasoning more clearly by reading the opening to Hebrews:

(Hebrews 1:5–6)<sup>5</sup> For to which of the angels did He ever say: “*You are My Son, today I have begotten You*”? and again: “*I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son*”?<sup>6</sup> But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: “*Let all the angels of God worship Him.*”

Jesus was not created. He was begotten in that He was sent forth into the world to “be” a Son, not that He was actually born into His first existence. “Firstborn” speaks to preeminence, not origin.

(Colossians 1:17–18)<sup>17</sup> And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.<sup>18</sup> And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

#### ***(4) “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness”***

The verb “declared” (*horizo*, Gk) can also be translated as “appointed” or “ordained.” It means He was sent into the world as God’s appointed Son.

(Luke 3:21–23)<sup>21</sup> When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened.<sup>22</sup> And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.”<sup>23</sup> Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age...

This declaration from heaven was the moment Jesus was “appointed” or “ordained” to ministry. Notice that Dr. Luke says that Jesus’ baptism was the beginning of His ministry.

This message from heaven was confirmation of the Messianic prophecy in Daniel:

(Daniel 9:25) “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah (“the anointed one”) the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks...”

Flesh (v3) vs. Spirit is a fundamental theme in Paul’s theology throughout Romans and his other letters. “Flesh” represents the old era that is sinful and is passing away; “Spirit” is the new birth era, inaugurated by Christ’s powerful work in us through the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, the reference to divine “holiness” appears in contrast to the “unholy” nature of fleshly humanity. Jesus did not possess a sinful nature but was holy like Adam before the fall. Yet, He experienced the same kinds of temptations, likely greater in that he was deity—capable of things beyond our mortal abilities. NOTE: In the incarnation, Jesus was unique in that His nature was like Adam’s before the fall and His flesh like Adam’s after the fall (neither entirely prelapsarian nor postlapsarian).

#### ***(5) “Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith”***

Faith is essential to obedience. And it is God's grace that makes us obedient to the faith. Paul elsewhere describes faith in terms of obedience, as in 10:16 when he speaks of people "obeying" the gospel.

(Ephesians 2:8–10)<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,<sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast.<sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

We are not saved by faith, but by grace *through* faith. It is through faith that we have "access" to God's grace (more on this when we get to chapter five).

The word *pistis* (faith) can also identify a specific kind of obedience Paul has in mind: "obedience that that comes by faith." Obedience to our calling demonstrates true faith that has been enabled by Christ by His Spirit.

We need to avoid viewing faith and obedience as entirely separate from one another or merging faith and obedience together as one in the same. These are two theological extremes. To Paul, faith *in* God and obedience *to* God are indispensable companions to our walk with Jesus.

Because Paul's focus throughout the book is on divine action toward mankind, we should understand the phrase "obedience to the faith" to include Christ's faithfulness to us. This is obedience grounded in the "faithfulness" (also *pistis*) of God toward us as demonstrated by the action of His grace. Holding fast to God's promise to accomplish for us what we cannot accomplish for ourselves is part of what Paul is conveying to the Christian believers. Do you believe that Jesus will do what He said He will do?

(Hebrews 12:1–2)<sup>1</sup> Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,<sup>2</sup> looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

On a personal level, we all have a calling to "apostleship" that we must obey. When we serve the Lord and His church, we are doing something we have no right to do by our own merit. We speak in Christ's name and share His love using spiritual gifts that He alone imparts. Only because the Lord has called us to minister in His name, and has given us the grace to do it, can we accomplish anything worthwhile for His kingdom. The choice to respond to God's calling is ours; the working out of the consequences (what happens thereafter) belongs to Him.

***(6–7) "you also are the called of Jesus Christ ... called to be saints"***

Paul then expands on this calling of "apostleship." In verse one he describes himself as "called." Here he reminds the saints that they are called too.

What is our calling? That question is answered in verse seven: “beloved of God, called to be saints.” We are “loved”—a love that motivated Christ to save us and then call us to follow Him.

This calling is repeated in the introduction to Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians: (1 Corinthians 1:2) To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord...

Peter picks up the same thought in his letter:

(1 Peter 1:15–16)<sup>15</sup> but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct,<sup>16</sup> because it is written, “*Be holy, for I am holy.*”

We find Peter’s ladder of spiritual growth in his second letter:

(2 Peter 1:5–11)<sup>5</sup> But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge,<sup>6</sup> to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness,<sup>7</sup> to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.<sup>8</sup> For if these things are yours and abound, *you* will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;<sup>11</sup> for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The word “saints” is *hagioi* (Greek), meaning “holy ones.” All believers and followers of Christ are “holy” in Christ. We are set apart for a holy purpose and we are being made holy every day. NOTE: Paul noted previously that Jesus was “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness” (v4). He imparts that holiness to His people.

### **(7) “To all who are in Rome...”**

The recipients of his letter are the Christians in the city of Rome. An important part of Paul’s agenda is to convey the idea that Christians (mostly Gentiles at this time) have inherited all the privileges and promises granted to Old Testament Israel. APPL: The church is spiritual Israel.

(From Splendor to Shadow, p. 368) That which God purposed to do for the world through Israel, the chosen nation, He will finally accomplish through His church. ... These witnesses for God are the spiritual Israel, and to them will be fulfilled all the covenant promises made to His ancient people.

### **Longing to Visit Christians in Rome**

(Romans 1:8–15)<sup>8</sup> First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.<sup>9</sup> For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,<sup>10</sup> making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.<sup>11</sup> For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—<sup>12</sup> that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.<sup>13</sup> Now I do not want you to

be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. <sup>14</sup> I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. <sup>15</sup> So, as much as is in me, *I am* ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

The section is marked by authenticity and warmth, as Paul tries to appeal to a wide audience of people he has yet to meet. NOTE: We can learn much from how Paul approaches believers with whom he has never engaged before.

**(9) “without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers”**

Paul is committed to praying for people of a “mutual faith” (v12). We can learn from Paul to intercede for each other in prayer, thanking the Lord for His work amongst the body of Christ.

**(10) “to come to you”**

Three times in this passage Paul talks about his longing to see the believers in Rome (verses 10, 11, 13). This is not merely rhetoric, but heartfelt love and affection for God’s people.

**(11) “impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established”**

It is not only Paul’s desire to “preach the gospel” to Christians in Rome, but to “establish” them in the faith. Part of maturing in our faith is the reception of spiritual gifts, so that the Holy Spirit can work to grow, equip, and send us into the world to share the gospel. This is Paul’s goal for all believers.

But some do not grow, as noted in his other letters. They never get established in the faith, as mature Christians eager to respond to God’s calling to share in the work of the gospel.

(1 Corinthians 3:1–3) <sup>1</sup> And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to *receive it*, and even now you are still not able; <sup>3</sup> for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?

**Notes from Peter Okrah**

**(12) “that I may be encouraged”**

Paul had heard of the great work going in Rome, and that was much joy to him. that it must needs be much more so to behold it. Paul wanted to encourage them and also to be encouraged by them.

As co-workers in God’s field, it helps to be able to confide in each other, compare notes about our spiritual concerns, and encourage each other.

### ***(13) "I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now)"***

His great desire was to see them. Paul had heard so many good things about them, and he had a great desire to be better acquainted with them.

Have you ever planned and prayed over something that is very important to you, but then something else comes up prevents your plans from coming to fruition? What happens when our good and godly plans go awry? Do we get angry with God?

Paul plans to go to Rome was to do God's work—to teach the Christians in Rome and to build up their faith. He wanted to spread the Gospel. Paul had prayed many times about these plans, but he had been prevented from going.

In Rom 15:22, Paul indicates that he had not been able to make the trip because other missionary trips (see Acts 16:6–7). In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul says it Satan had prevented him from visiting them.

### ***(14) "I am a debtor"***

Paul had received a lot, and so he has a great sense of obligation. On the road to Damascus, he was rescued by God; Paul was converted. His talents were now to be used to honor God. What have we received? John 3:16 – Jesus Christ; eternal life.

Paul was called to be apostle, called and sent to work. We have all been called and sent. What we do is not to repay the debt, because we can never repay the debt. We have obligation to bring others to the Living Water.

### ***(15) "I am ready"***

Though Rome was where Christianity met with a great deal of opposition, Paul was ready to go there. It seems Paul used the words "I am ready" as his marching words. On the road to Damascus, the first words out of his mouth when Jesus revealed Himself to him were "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:6).

- Paul was ready to preach and to serve (Rom 1:15)
- Paul was ready to suffer and die for Christ (Acts 21:13)
- Paul was ready to do unpleasant work (2 Cor 10:4-6)
- Paul was ready to visit the churches (2 Cor 12:14, 1 Thes 2:18)
- Paul, in his valedictory speech, was ready to die (2 Tim 4:6-8)

I am ready denotes a great readiness of mind, prepared to go wherever the Lord sends him. We must also be ready every day, by putting on the whole armor of God (see Eph 6:10-18).

### ***Not Ashamed of the Gospel***

(Romans 1:16–17) <sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “*The just shall live by faith.*”

### **(16) “I am not ashamed”**

These verses are transitional. Verse 16 begins with a conjunction “for” (*gar*), which connects it to the previous verses. So, the train of thought is that Paul was so eager to preach the gospel to the believers in Rome *because* he was not ashamed of the gospel.

The negative form of the opening, “I am not ashamed,” might reveal that Paul is on the defensive here. He could be answering the question people may have about Paul’s motivation of intention.

We can also note that these words belong to the introduction to the letter, but they are also closely related to the body of the letter that follows.

### **(16) “it is the power of God to salvation”**

These are similar words Paul uses in the opening of His letter to the church in Corinth:

(1 Corinthians 1:18) For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

The message of the cross, which is the gospel of Christ, is the power of God. It draws us to Him.

(John 12:32) “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”

The gospel compels people to respond—to either receive or reject it. When received, it saves with divine power that flows from God to every believer.

The word “salvation” is translated from two primary words, *soteria* (noun), as in this verse, and *sozo* (verb), as in 1 Corinthians 1:18. We find these important words throughout Paul’s letters. Sometimes we use this language to describe conversion (when you were saved), but Paul more often uses it to refer to our deliverance from sin and evil (as we live a sanctified life in Christ). We have “been” saved (justification) and we are “being” saved (sanctification) every day.

### **(17) “in it the righteousness of God”**

The phrase in the Greek is *dikaio syne theou*, literally “righteousness of God.” Paul uses the phrase only nine times in his letters, but eight of them appear in Romans. Therefore, God’s righteousness is a significant focus of this letter.

Three interpretations are popular:

1. Righteousness as an attribute. God's righteousness is His faithfulness to His creation and His justice in relating to mankind.
2. Righteousness from God. This is a status given to people by God. This is the traditional view by the Protestant Reformers and many of today's theologians. When God "justifies" (Greek verb *dikaioo*, which is cognate to the word for "righteousness") the sinner, he/she is given a new legal standing, which becomes their "righteousness."
3. Righteousness done by God. This is an act of God making things right. This view is held by a growing number of scholars and gives a dynamic sense to "righteousness." It is God's intervention to set right what has gone wrong with his creation.

In this passage, the second view seems to fit the message of Paul's letter.

"God does not deal with his people in a vacuum. He himself has established a covenant relationship with them. This relationship is the context in which God deals with Israel. What is 'right' for Israel is set forth in her covenant obligations. Similarly, what is 'right' for God to do is enunciated in his own commitment to his people. In these contexts, therefore, God's righteousness often takes on the notion of 'faithfulness,' as God reiterates the commitment he has made to his people." (Commentary on Romans, Douglas J. Moo, Zondervan)

The Bible speaks of God's righteousness as being almost synonymous with his salvation. One example is found in Isaiah 51:

(Isaiah 51:5–8)<sup>5</sup> "My righteousness *is* near, My salvation has gone forth, and My arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands will wait upon Me, and on My arm they will trust.<sup>6</sup> Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, the earth will grow old like a garment, and those who dwell in it will die in like manner; but My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not be abolished.<sup>7</sup> Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, you people in whose heart *is* My law: do not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their insults.<sup>8</sup> For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool; but My righteousness will be forever, and My salvation from generation to generation."

"As the parallelism in ... these texts makes clear, God's 'righteousness' is equivalent to the 'salvation' he promises to bring to his people. 'Righteousness' here denotes God's saving activity, in which he upholds what is 'right' by vindicating his people and delivering them from their distress. Part of our problem is that we have no verb in English that is cognate to 'righteousness,' but the idea would be that God 'righteouses' his people." (Commentary on Romans, Douglas J. Moo, Zondervan)

### **(17) "revealed from faith to faith"**

The central motif in Paul's gospel is that one can experience the righteousness of God only through faith. Some translations render this phrase as an emphatic construction, "faith from first to last" (NIV). A person who believes in Christ will have an ongoing active faith, living constantly in the righteousness of God. Their lives will provide evidence that God's righteousness not only resides *in* them but flows out to others *through* them.

### ***(17) “The just shall live by faith”***

There are two possibilities here. Paul is emphasizing that righteous people should live by faith (NIV; NASB; KJV) or he is asserting that it is only the person who has become righteous by faith who will attain life (NRSV; TEV; REB)? The syntax does not bring any clarity, but Paul’s emphasis throughout the letter is that a person is righteous (justified) only by faith. This seems to favor the second interpretation.

### ***The Wrath of God Against People Who Oppose the Truth***

(Romans 1:18–21) <sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup> because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, <sup>21</sup> because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

As we read this section of the letter, we are surprised. Considering how Paul began the letter, he suddenly shifts the topic from the salvation of Christ to the wrath of God against sin and sinners. These are the only two choices in our eternal destiny.

### ***(18) “wrath of God is revealed from heaven”***

We can observe a direct correlation between righteousness and wrath. Both are represented as being “revealed.” In order to reveal God’s righteousness in the gospel, it is also necessary to reveal His wrath against sin. We have a deeper appreciation of the incredible gift of salvation in Christ when we know what our destiny was without Him.

God’s reaction to sin is not an emotionally angry outburst, but the necessary response of a holy God to sin. While God’s wrath has been measured in the past, He will one day pour out His wrath on the entire earth. This seems to be the point since Paul is talking about everything from creation to our ultimate salvation at the end of the world.

(Revelation 20:9) ... And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

### ***(18) “who suppress the truth in unrighteousness”***

A person can only suppress something of which they have knowledge. He goes on to say that people have a knowledge of God because “God has shown it to them” (v19). This is why in doing so they show their “unrighteousness.” Rather than testify of the truth, they speak from the lie.

### ***(20) “creation ... invisible attributes are clearly seen”***

Paul here refers to what is often called “natural revelation,” which is God revealing his existence through nature. Although God is invisible to the eye, He is “clearly seen” through nature, and through its design, beauty, and function.

**(20) “they are without excuse”**

Creation itself reveals God and His goodness to humanity, so there simply is no excuse for failing to understand His intentions and the salvation He so graciously offers. People must intentionally deny what they see all around them to believe what Paul refers to as “the lie.”

Atheists argue what they believe are facts, but these are biased interpretations of data they have collected. Data can be factual, but interpretations are heavily influenced by one’s belief system. If you deny God’s existence, then you cannot accept the idea of a Creator, no matter the evidence in creation all around you.

**(21) “became futile in their thoughts”**

The dreamed-up machinations that help solidify their belief in the lie. The more they believe the lie, the more futile they become in their thoughts. This eventually makes it impossible to accept anything contrary to their belief system, the theory of evolution.

Paul used very similar language in another letter to describe those who believe the lie:

(2 Thessalonians 2:9–12)<sup>9</sup> The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,<sup>10</sup> and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.<sup>11</sup> And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,<sup>12</sup> that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

***The Exchange***

(Romans 1:22–28)<sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools,<sup>23</sup> and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.<sup>24</sup> Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,<sup>25</sup> who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.<sup>26</sup> For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.<sup>27</sup> Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.<sup>28</sup> 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;

**(22) “professing to be wise, they became fools”**

It is often the case that when someone claims to be wise, that they immediately reveal that they are not. There are many throughout history that touted their own wisdom. But this is not the wisdom of God.

(Proverbs 12:15) The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise.

(Jeremiah 8:9) The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken. Behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord; so what wisdom do they have?

“Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt.” Maurice Switzer

### ***(23–28) “changed (exchanged)” ... “God gave them up”***

Here we find a sequence of three acts and consequences using a single word group, *allasso/metallasso*:

- They “changed” (*allasso*) the glory” of God (v23) — “God ... gave them up to uncleanness” (v24)
- They “exchanged (*metallasso*) the truth of God for the lie” (v25) — “God gave them up to vile passions” (v26)
- They “exchanged (*metallasso*) the natural use” of sex (v26) — “God gave them over to a debased mind” (v28)

In each case, human beings substituted their own god for the truth God has revealed to them. God’s response is to hand them over to experience the consequences of their choices.

### ***(23) “the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man”***

In this first exchange, mankind became idol worshipers, choosing gods of their own making. This caused them to dishonor the bodies that were originally created in God’s image.

### ***(24) “God gave them up”***

When Paul says, “God gave them up,” he is not speaking of their eternal judgment, but the temporary. Giving someone up is letting them bear the consequences of their own choice. When people reject God’s plan for them, the devil carries out his plan. It’s God’s love for us that causes Him to allow us to experience the depths of where sin will take us.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul tells them to “deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 5:5). God’s goal is always to save. When He allow us to experience the consequences of sin, it’s with the hope that they will see the error of their way and come to Him for salvation.

### **(25) “the truth of God for the lie”**

In the second exchange, mankind rejected the truth and believed the lie. This has resulted in using their bodies for “vile passions,” the natural fruit of their corrupted condition.

“The lie” is the one being told to the world by Satan. He tells us that we are free when we follow our own course in life. Instead, his plan keeps us in slavery to the passions of our corrupted heart.

Most of the world believes that we are naturally good inside. “Just follow your heart,” they say. But the Word of God says the opposite.

(Jeremiah 17:9) The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?

We are seeing the consequences of believing the lie today. Mankind has returned to living like the people in “the days of Noah,” as foretold by Christ (Matthew 24:37).

(Genesis 6:5) Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

When people embrace the lie, they live for themselves and explore pleasures that are disgraceful to God. Not only have we contrived the idea that there is no God, we live according to our desires. Media is a good example of this. Over the last 50 years, media has provided the evidence of how far mankind has fallen to gratify the lust of the flesh.

### **(26) “the natural use for what is against nature”**

In the third exchange, we see how far our corrupted “passions” have taken us. What God created in the Garden of Eden is now being used in unnatural ways. What Paul specifically references here is homosexuality—a sexual act that runs contrary to God’s plan for pro-creating the world through marriage by a man and woman.

(Leviticus 18:22) You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.

“Natural” is referring to what is designed by God at creation. Our sexual organs are designed by God to fit and complement the opposite in a way that can result in the conception of new life.

### **(27) “lust for one another”**

The language used here indicates mutuality, rather than exploitation. The word “one another” is the Greek word *allēlous*, which indicates a reciprocal relationship, a shared experience of desire.

### **(27) “men with men committing what is shameful”**

Paul speaks of homosexuality as “committing” the act of intercourse. He is not addressing inclination. Same sex attraction is not a sin, but it can cause a propensity to experiencing sexual temptation, if dwelt upon.

It is shameful to give into sexual perversion, whether we embrace it with our mind or commit the act itself. We must remember that sexual immorality is a temptation for most human beings, whether they are opposite or same sex attracted.

(James 1:14–15)<sup>14</sup> But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.<sup>15</sup> Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Some have tried to say that “men with men” is addressing non-committed relationships in the Greek culture like pederasty (older dominating over the younger) or master-slave rape, but this does not fit the greater text of the Bible.

(1 Corinthians 6:9–10)<sup>9</sup> Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals,<sup>\*</sup> nor sodomites,<sup>+</sup><sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

\*The word *malakos* refers to males who are “soft” who play the role of the female in homosexual intercourse.

+The word *arsenokoitai*, literally means “men lying with males.” The compound term points to the background of the LXX translators in their rendering of Lev 18:22 and Lev 20:13, as they combined the words male (*arsēn*) and lying (*koitē*), which correspond to the Hebrew words *zakar* (male) and *mishkab* (lying), to denote “homosexual intercourse.” The word also appears in Paul’s lawless list in 1 Tim 1:10.

### ***(27) “receiving in themselves the penalty of their error”***

Paul seems to be referring to the consequences of their behavior in the now, not the final result of rebellion against God. He does not say specifically what the “penalty” is, just that it happens “in themselves,” mentally or physically.

### ***(28) “a debased mind”***

The “debased mind” is what causes the behaviors listed in verses 29–32. It is what happens naturally when a person does not “retain God in their knowledge.”

### ***Paul’s List of Corrupted Thoughts and Behavior***

(Romans 1:29–32)<sup>29</sup> being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers,<sup>30</sup> backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,<sup>31</sup> undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;<sup>32</sup> who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

Here we have one of Paul's list of behaviors that result of "exchanging" God's plan for the things of their own making.

***(32) "approve of those who practice them"***

Paul is writing to the church, so he is directing his warning at those who feel like they are like "these kind of people." He adds that it's not just those who "practice" these things, but those who "approve" of them. How do we approve of them? We view the things they do in our media consumption or we encourage people who do them, telling them that they are still okay with God. While it is true that God loves them, Paul's warning is about turning people from their evil practices, trusting that God will renew them in holiness.