

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

ROMANS 1

Paul wanted to visit Rome. He realized the city's strategic importance. And he'd heard *glowing reports* of a *growing church* at the heart of the empire.

Paul was spending the spring of 58 AD in the Greek town of Corinth. One day he heard that a friend from the neighboring village of Cenchrea was headed for Rome. He asked *Phoebe* to deliver a letter for him...

Paul was headed to Jerusalem for the feast. He'd been warned of danger awaiting him, possibly even death. This letter to the Romans might be his last opportunity to expound on the truths God gave him.

It was the skeptic, Renan, who commented, "[When Phoebe sailed from the port of Corinth she carried beneath the folds of her robe the whole future of Christian theology.](#)" And how right he was! What Paul thought was his *final* opportunity became his *finest* effort. Romans was Paul's theological masterpiece.

Almost every Bible doctrine finds its *best defense* and *fullest explanation* in Paul's letter to the Romans.

Throughout the ages, this one book has single-handedly sparked revivals, incited revolutions, altered the history of nations, and transformed billions of lives.

The great preacher, John Chrysostom, thought so highly of this letter he read it once a week for 18 years.

Pastor Donald Barnhouse said the Bible of any believer should be so worn that it automatically opens to the book of

Romans... For the next few weeks we'll be gleaning from this field of plenty called Romans.

The book begins, "Paul..."

The ancients began their letters the way we end them, with a signature. Since letters were written on scrolls they put the signature first, so you didn't have to completely unroll the scroll to identify its author.

"Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ..." He could've introduced himself as "warrior of the faith, illustrious theologian, planter of churches, missionary to the world," Instead Paul opts for "*bondservant*" or "love slave." It referred to a situation found in Exodus 21...

In ancient Israel if you couldn't pay your debts you didn't file for bankruptcy, you worked-off what you owed as your creditor's slave... And some people fared better as a slave, in the house of a benevolent master, than they did on their own. In such cases, when the debt was paid, it wasn't uncommon for the slave to choose to remain with his former creditor.

The owner would press his servant's ear against the doorpost, and drive a sharp awl through his earlobe.

The slave's pierced ear was a symbol of the servant's voluntary love and gratitude for his master.

You and I have a similar relationship with Jesus. He's forgiven us our debt. We owe him our **A(W)LL!**

We're slaves to the Master, yet once we spend time in His house we realize how gracious and generous He is to His

slaves. We learn that life with Jesus is far better than the life we could achieve on our own..

We may start out serving the Lord out of *obligation*, but ultimately we end up serving from *appreciation*.

Like Paul we become a love-slave of Jesus!

Paul was also “*called to be an apostle...*”

The word “*Apostle*” means “*to be sent out.*” Paul was not a self-appointed preacher. He was called and commissioned by God Himself. *You can tell if a pastor was **sent**, or did he just **went**...* Paul was **sent** by God.

Verse 1 also tells us Paul was “*separated to the gospel of God, which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*”

Paul was devoted to one message - “*the gospel of God*” - and God’s Gospel is all about His Son, Jesus. And note three truths Paul mentions about Jesus...

He is **revealed** in the OT Scriptures... He **reigns** according to the lineage of King David... And He's been **resurrected** by the power of the Holy Spirit...

The case for Jesus as God’s Messiah is airtight. He claimed to be the Lord of the universe and Savior of the world through **prophecy**, and **pedigree**, and **power**.

Verse 5, “*Through Him we have received grace...*”

Here's the theme of the letter: "*we have received grace!*" Grace is love we don't deserve and can never earn. It's God's love. It's love that's on the house!

Remember, Paul started out a Jewish rabbi. He lived under the Law, and felt a constant pressure to perform.

What a relief it was to discover God's grace!

When Paul embraced Jesus He was loved despite *what he did* - or *who he was* - or *what he didn't do*.

God didn't ask Paul to *try* just *trust!* Salvation was not *me do* but *He did!* God called Paul not to a *responsibility* - He was simply saying, *respond to Me!*

There's a legend about a young man who fell in love with a wicked woman. His mother disliked this gal and tried to break up the relationship. The man ignored his mom and moved in with the woman. One night the vengeful woman got the fellow drunk. She told him the only way he could prove his love for her was to kill his mom, cut out her heart, and bring it back as a trophy.

I told you she was an evil. The young man stumbled through streets to his mom's house. He went in with a butcher knife, stabbed her, and carved out her heart.

But as he staggered back with the prize in hand, he fell to the ground and dropped his mother's heart. As the legend goes, when he reached to pick up the bleeding heart, it spoke to him, "*My son, are you hurt?*"

And this is how cruel we've been to Jesus.

We stabbed the nails into His hands and feet - and broke His heart... yet He still speaks lovingly to each of one of us, “Child, are you hurt?” This is God's grace!

Grace is the Father kissing His Prodigal Son... It's Jesus saying to the adulteress, “Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more...” It's His prayer on the cross, “Father forgive them, they know not what they do...”

Grace changed everything for Paul. It turned labor into love. *Don't be surprised if this book changes you!*

Verse 5, “Through Him (that is, Christ) we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ...” As an ambassador of grace, God had issued Paul a visa into all nations. Obviously, **God's grace is for every race!**

In verse 7 Paul addresses his readers, “To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be saints*...”

Erroneously, throughout church history “*saints*” have been thought of as special Christians. The saints are thought to be All Stars - Hall of Famers. **But not so.**

The word “*saint*” simply means “to set apart.” You either belong to Jesus or you don't. You're either His or you're not. You're either a *saint* or you are an *ain't*.

And Paul greets the saints, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Here are the bookends of faith - “*grace and peace.*”

Grace is our *origination*. Peace is our *culmination*... A believer starts out with grace and ends with His peace.

And Paul says of the Romans, verse 8, “**First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.**” The Church in Rome had quite a reputation in the ancient world.

“**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, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.**” This church was spoken of around the world, but one of the reasons why is that Paul spoke of them often before God’s throne. Though he’d never visited them, he prayed for them diligently.

According to Acts 2:10, present in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost were a group of Jews from Rome. It could be they were converted by Peter's sermon, filled with the Spirit, and returned to Rome to start a church.

Over the years their church became famous - not for its building, or pastor, or size, or organization... Notice, this church **was renown for their faith!** If our church ever becomes famous I hope its because of our *faith!*

Paul wanted to visit the church at Rome, *and he tells us why*, verse 11, “**For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established - that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.**”

Folks usually flocked to Rome for amusement. Rome hosted the Forum, and later the Coliseum. NASCAR fans could catch a chariot race at the Circus Maximus.

But in the belly of this vast city, beneath the glitz and glamor, were a small group of people - precious and important to God. Paul desired to visit Rome so he could build up these believers - *to give and to receive*.

And this is what church is about! *We're like a blood bank*. Some days you donate blood. Other days you get a transfusion. Paul wants to impart a spiritual gift.

Verse 13, “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.

I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.” Paul had wanted to come to Rome, but he'd been busy elsewhere. Paul sensed a responsibility to all men. He owed God for His grace, but his debt was made payable to his fellow man.

This is how we say thanks to Jesus, by loving the folks He died to save. Paul had tasted God's grace, and he responds, “So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.”

History documents that long before the Goths and Vandals rode their horses into Rome the city collapsed internally. Rome become rich, privileged, and spoiled.

Rome was constantly lusting for new ways to be entertained. The Romans became lawless out of sheer

boredom. Tacitus wrote of the city's perverse attitude, "the greater the infamy, the wilder the delight."

Roman civilization fell victim to moral collapse.

Here's how it happened... Rome lost respect for human life. Babies were viewed as an inconvenience, and left at the market to be sold as slaves... Marital fidelity became an unheard of virtue. The debutants of Rome dated years by the names of their husbands...

Fourteen of the first fifteen emperors became so bored with their natural appetite for women that they sought perverse pleasure in homosexual acts. Romans legitimized homosexuality, even with young boys.

Imagine this... the wife of Cesar Claudius, the Empress Agrippina, would leave her palace at night and work in the brothels for the sake of sheer lust.

You've heard of *skid row* - welcome to *skid Rome*.

Rome was a raunchy and rowdy place, yet Paul wasn't intimidated. He was ready to preach in Rome.

For he was proud of the Gospel, and he declares his confidence in its power. In verse 16 he states, "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.

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "*The just shall live by faith.*"

Understand, the Gospel is the greatest change agent known to man. The truth that Jesus *died to forgive our sin* and rose

to live in our hearts has the ability to transform hearts, history, culture, and even the future.

This is why churches that stray from the Gospel do a disservice to both God and men. We need to trust in the Gospel of Jesus enough to share it with our friends.

Beginning in Chapter 3, Paul will explain the Gospel, but first his strategy is to convince us of our need. It's been said, "Before the Good News can be *received*, the bad news has to be *believed*." We don't sense our need for a Savior, until we first recognize our sin.

And in the last half of Chapter 1 Paul dissects the downward spiral of Roman culture. He discusses the three stages of their moral and spiritual disintegration...

In verses 18-21 Paul shows how the world system *both then and now* **suppresses** the truth... Verses 22-27 describe how it **confuses** the truth... And verses 28-32 reveal how it **transgresses** or violates the truth.

Even today, the world we live in **suppresses the truth, confuses the truth, and transgresses the truth.**

Paul begins in verse 18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness..." Verse 17 told us the Gospel of Christ reveals *the righteousness of God*. Now in verse 18 heaven reveals *the wrath of God*. Reject or ignore God's righteousness, and you're subject to His wrath.

Once a country church sat next door to a parcel of farm land owned by an avid atheist. He was a mean, godless man.

Every Sunday morning the atheist would rev up his tractor to drown out the pastor's message.

When the harvest came and his fields yielded a bumper crop he considered it proof that God didn't exist. One year he wrote the church a haughty letter boasting in his efforts. *But I love the pastor's reply.*

He wrote a single sentence, "Dear Sir, God does not settle all His accounts in the month of October!" *It may be now or it may be later* but a Christ-rejecting world will eventually taste the terrible wrath of Almighty God.

Paul says God's wrath is "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness..." "Ungodliness" is the rejection of God's authority. "Unrighteousness" is the rejection of God's standards. A rebellious man first *denies* God's existence, then he *defies* God's commandments.

Fifty years ago Bible reading and prayer were a part of our public school curriculum. *And at the time, the top disciplinary problems educators faced were chewing gum, talking out of turn, and being late for class.*

Today, we've eliminated God from the classroom. He's been excluded from the subject matter. We've outlawed prayer, and made it illegal for teachers to read or consult the Bible... And now *our schools have metal detectors to screen for guns and knives - police dogs that sniff out drugs - girls can't go to the restroom by themselves for fear of being raped.* It's tragic.

I know our problems are more complex than just the absence of Bible reading, but our schools do illustrate the truth: **ungodliness produces unrighteousness.**

When people stop believing in God there's no higher authority to govern their behavior. Right and wrong are up for grabs. *Modern society* like *ancient Rome* has suppressed the truth of God, and in doing so they have opened wide the floodgates of unrighteousness!

Verse 19, people suppress the truth “**because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. 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...**” When we think of how God reveals Himself we usually think of the Bible, but even without the Bible there's much we know about God. The knowledge of God is revealed to all men in at least two ways...

First, there is a knowledge *in them, in their hearts.*

And second, God reveals Himself *to them, in the heavens.* *Look inward* and you find evidence for God... *Look upward* and you see proof of His eternal power...

Just as animals have migratory instincts, people are made with an intuitive knowledge of God. The Creator implants in each of us a homing device. It never shuts off, until we find our way back to Him. Ecclesiastes 3:9 says it well, God “**has put eternity in their hearts...**”

A childhood disease left Helen Keller without sight, hearing, and speech. As a young girl she was taught tirelessly by her dedicated teacher, Anne Sullivan.

Anne taught Helen brail and eventually how to talk.

When Anne first told her about God, the young girl told her teacher that *she already knew about God. She just didn't know His name!* It was proof that there's an innate knowledge of God *in* each and every one of us.

Look inward and you'll find evidence for God, but *look upward* to the sky and there too you'll behold His glory. Psalm 19:1 puts it, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handiwork."

It's been said, "Nature was the first missionary."

During the French Revolution, one of the atheistic revolutionaries bragged to a believing peasant, "*We will pull down all that reminds you of God.*" The faithful Christian replied, "*Then pull down the stars!*"

Think of it, you're sitting on ball 25,000 miles in circumference. It weighs 6 septillion, 588 sextillion ton, and hangs unsupported in the nothingness of space.

Planet Earth spins at 1000 miles per hour, while it barrels through space at a 1000 miles per minute - *yet amazingly your Bible doesn't even fall off your lap.*

I'm sorry, but I don't have enough faith to believe that kind of engineering occurs by chance. A world of order requires an orderly God. *Design needs a designer.*

To the unbiased observer God is an obvious reality, yet Paul says despite the enormous weight of evidence people still *“suppress the truth.”* They resist it with excuses. Ignore the obvious. Try to keep it under raps.

Yet, Paul says the evidence is so overwhelming mankind is without excuse. *It's not that we can't believe in God, it's that we won't believe.* If a person concedes God exists; then he's no longer captain of his own ship.

Admit there's a God and you're accountable to that God. This is why sinful man suppresses the obvious.

It's scandalous for a society which prides itself on tolerance to be tolerant of every ideology except biblical Christianity? Yet that's where we're at today...

Several years ago the School Board in Pullin County, Illinois prohibited a school from having a traditional Christmas nativity in the yard of their campus.

The school's principal was furious. He wrote the following on the school's message board, *"The Board of Education is jealous of our nativity scene, for on the Board they cannot find three wise men or a virgin!"*

I believe even the most ungodly, ardent atheist knows deep down inside the truth about God, yet he or she hardens their heart, and *“suppresses the truth!”*

Verse 21, *“because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful...”* Here's a warning, it's possible to know God - even benefit from His blessings - yet fail to acknowledge the Giver of those blessings. When your life goes well, *do you take the credit or chalk it up to chance?*

Some folks talk as if God is a non-issue. They take Him for granted.

“Nor were (they) thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man - and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.”

The world in Paul's day worshipped idols. They turned *birds, beasts, and bumblebees* into gods. And people today do the same. They worship birds, beasts, and bees - *their weekends revolve around Falcons, Bulldogs, and Yellow Jackets*. You can turn anything into an idol - even a bird, or a beast, or a bee...

Idolatry is giving a greater glory to the creature than to the Creator. **It's placing a matter of secondary importance in a primary position in your life.**

Paul says people became *“futile in their thoughts...”* and, *“professing to be wise, they became fools...”*

Smart people stopped thinking rationally!

And this happens when people suppress the truth about God. **Once a man rejects the most important thing, which is God - he tends to fall for anything.**

It never ceases to amaze me, how brilliant folks will refuse to believe in God, yet they read their horoscope religiously, or even visit a palm reader... College professors who'd never pick up a Bible, and dismiss outright that God became a man, seriously believe we have been visited by aliens from another world.

Evolution is another example of *“professing to be wise, they became fools.”* Despite the absence of missing links - despite the near zero probability of life forming by chance - despite criticisms from their own camp - despite not a shred of hard scientific evidence to support their theories - they still believe in the evolution of life. The strength of a prejudice is amazing.

Famed philosopher Malcolm Muggeridge once said, *“I'm convinced the theory of evolution... will be one of the greatest jokes in the history books of the future. Posterity will marvel that so very flimsy and dubious an hypothesis could be accepted with the incredible gullibility that it has.”* Remember, once you concede there's a God, you become accountable to Him. And modern man doesn't want to be accountable to anyone but himself. This is how darkness has taken over...

Verse 24, *“Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves...”* Having worshipped animals they began to live like animals. Over time a person grows to resemble whatever it is they worship.

After teaching kids that they've ascended from apes, why are we surprised when they *monkey around*?

Teach a child that he or she is nothing but an *animal* and he'll become a *party animal*... Why expect a kid to develop spiritual appetites and moral standards if you tell them that all they consist of are *glands and hands*.

Today's moral relativism doesn't give folks a reason why one human whim is any more right or wrong than another. People are driven by their lusts to dishonor their bodies.

They've lost any concept of the sanctity of human sexuality. They're given over to uncleanness.

“Who (also) exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” They “*exchanged the truth of God for the lie...*” Imagine a society that calls right wrong, and wrong right...

Today, homosexuality is no longer labeled a dysfunction, *let alone a sin*, it's a protected preference... Abortion isn't murder, it's a woman's right to choose... Gender isn't our biological reality, it's an assignment based on feelings... A family of one father and one mother is no longer the optimum environment for raising kids - now any configuration will do...

When pleasing and honoring the creature becomes more important than obeying the Creator; **then truly the patients have taken over the asylum!**

Here's what's happened... to avoid God's authority we **suppress** His truth. Then to convince ourselves we're right, we've **confuse** the truth to **normalized** the pathological and deviant. We've created a new ethics.

Here's how topsy-turvy the world has become... As Paul says, they “*worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator.*” Throw out the Creator God, and humanity becomes a slave to the creation.

Animal rights and environmental concerns take precedent over human needs. In the absence of our Judeo-Christian ethic, humanity loses its uniqueness.

We're no longer viewed as made in God's image, but as a privileged species of animal who oppress other species. The Bible teaches that God created us in His image and gave us dominion over the rest of creation.

Nature and animals are meant to serve man's needs. Animals exist to provide us milk, and meat, and wool.

But without God and the Bible - in a pagan world - rather than humans taking charge of nature and using it for our benefit - we become its slave. We end up caring more about *animal rights* than *human welfare*.

Several years ago, I read where a doctor was anesthetizing cats - then shooting them with a BB-gun to find ways to help humans traumatized by gunshot wounds. His research was helping injured soldiers.

You'd think that would be a noble cause.

Yet his experiments were stopped by animal rights activists who thought Snowball and Fluffy were more important than Sergeant and First Class. The truth is, man is not an animal. *It's a confused society that puts animal life on a par with human life.* Unlike animals, man is made in God's image, and has an eternal soul.

But in verse 26 it gets worse... **"For this reason God gave them up to vile passions."** In his commentary on Romans, Donald Barnhouse writes, **"The last nine verses in the first chapter of Romans are the most terrible in the Bible... The scene is frightful."**

Three times in three verses (verses 24, 26, 28) Paul tells us, "**God gave them up!**" or "**gave them over!**"

Realize, God judges sinners by letting them pursue sin with an unbridled passion. He looses the restraints.

He pours out His wrath on people bent on sinning, by allowing'em to pursue sin, and reap its consequences. It's a just punishment. **You get what you've ask for...**

And in the remainder of Chapter 1, Paul tells us how you know when God has turned loose of a society.

When an indicator light on my dashboard flashes I know there's a problem with my car. And likewise there are cultural indicators that a society is in deep trouble.

Paul gives us 23 indicators that a society is on the verge of collapse... but the primary, clear-cut indicator that God has given a people over to sin is the cultural acceptance and legitimization of homosexuality.

Listen to what Paul says in the next two verses...

"For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature." When it comes to sexual deviance, women are usually less prone than men. But in Rome even the women behaved in unnatural ways.

"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."

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..." *Debased* means "castaway or rejected."

Realize, a relationship with God requires that you accept God's rules. You can't play a game if you reject its rules. I can play football and violate the rules - say I'm offside... I get penalized five yards. That's okay.

The game of football allows for me to break the rules, **but I have to admit there are rules, or I can't play the game.** And so it is in a relationship with God.

A repentant mind sins, but it admits it and desires to change... A debased mind sins, but refuses to admit there's such a thing - or rejects God's definition of it.

Thus, the ultimate destiny for those who suppress God's truth is God stops working with them - convicting and wooing them to Himself. He gives them up to their own lies. As a consequence their evil gets set in stone.

A debased mind participates in deviant behavior without the slightest tinge of guilt. In fact, it demands that you accept it. It's militant in its quest for legitimacy.

And this describes today's homosexual community.

LGBT advocates are no longer content to practice their perversion privately, they want it normalized.

They're trying to socialize children and society to see homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle. They desire to be a privileged group with legal protections, and force acceptance of their lifestyle onto the rest of society.

They've justified their rejection of God's order, *and God has given them up...* In verses 26-27 Paul tells us four truths about homosexuality - it's **not natural**, it's **not normal**, it's **not noble**, and it's **not neutral**.

First, it's **not natural**. Paul says both women and men left the "*natural use*" of the opposite sex to lust after those of the same sex. A quick peek at male and female genitalia reveals a natural anatomical fit - *when men and women mate their parts connect*. The same natural congruity doesn't exist within same sex unions.

The Bible teaches that God created gender. Men are designed sexually for women, just as women are tailored for men. Heterosexuality was dictated by God. It's how He intended for men and women to function.

The research often cited to support the theory that people are **born** homosexual is seriously flawed.

For 25 years Dr. Robert Kronemeyer worked with homosexuals, and concluded, "**With rare exceptions, homosexuality is neither inherited nor a result of some glandular disturbance or the scrambling of genes or chromosomes. Homosexuals are made, not born... I firmly believe homosexuality is a *learned* response to early painful experiences, thus it can be *unlearned*...**"

Yet for the sake of argument, what if it were proven that a gay gene does exist? Does that mean we should condone and legitimize homosexual behavior?

If a person is biologically predisposed to alcoholism, or depression - should we ignore the disorder or should we try to treat it if we can?.. Or if a person is prone to violence should we legitimize all violence? *Surely not.*

The point is, if the Bible is God's Word, and says it's not natural, then it's a behavior that should be avoided.

Second, neither is this homosexuality **normal**.

I believe there're two roots from which homosexual behavior stems... First, is gender attachment. Through abuse or neglect people at early ages develop abnormal *psychological* attractions. This is the homosexual who may not understand why he feels the way he does... But the homosexual Paul is describing in Romans 1 *"burns in his lust."* This is a different set of causes. Here's a person who's eaten up with desire.

This is the person who gets bored with heterosexual experiences, and in their quest for greater thrills, they flirt with a taboo. He or she swings back and forth. This is Madonna and Britney Spears pushing boundaries... It's the Katy Perry, *"I kissed a girl"-type phenomena.*

This is what happened in the bath houses of ancient Rome. The brothels no longer satisfied appetites, so perverse Romans adopted an anything goes sexuality.

Paul says homosexuality is **not natural, not normal, and not noble**. He describes homosexual practices as *"men with men committing what is shameful."* The Greek word, *"shameful,"* can be translated *"deformed."*

Such practices twist God's original intention.

Ephesians 5 teaches us that heterosexual marriage is meant to be a picture of Christ's relationship with the Church. Homosexuality distorts and perverts this picture. It *masculinizes the female and feminizes the male*. It disrupts the God-given roles and identities.

Finally, God says homosexuality is **not neutral**. These acts come with a punishment, *“receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.”*

Don't be naive, you can't buck God and nature and not pay the piper. Giving in to homosexual tendencies takes a terrible toll... *a seared-conscience, insecurities, loneliness, depression, guilt, confusion* - are all the price of perversion. Not to mention health dangers...

Even though AIDS can be contracted in a number of ways, still 70% of its victims are homosexual. Depression, substance abuse, even suicide are greater among homosexuals than the rest of the population.

Paul isn't saying homosexuals are not loved by God, and that Jesus didn't die on the cross to take away even the sin of homosexuality. It's **not natural, not normal, not noble, and not neutral** - *but it is forgivable*.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6, *“Do not be deceived. neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites... will inherit the kingdom of God.”* But then adds, *“And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”* I love the phrase, *“Such were some of you!”* In the Corinthian church

there were former homosexuals who had been forgiven and set free. It was proof no sin is beyond the reach of God's grace.

As I said earlier, Paul is saying homosexuality is an indicator that a society is in trouble - that it has strayed dangerously far from God. But there're other indicators.

A long list begins in verses 29-31, "Being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful..." Let me run through this list quickly...

"*Sexual immorality*" - The Greek is "*pornea*" from which we get "*pornography*." It can apply to all forms of illicit sexual arousal and activity. Recall, Paul was writing from Corinth - *sin city of the ancient world*.

He also mentions, "*Wickedness*" - The Greek word means to work or toil at wickedness... "*Covetousness*" is greed. It's the itch for more... "*Maliciousness*" is the desire to do physical harm to another person... "*Strife*" is the tendency to argue just for the sake of arguing...

"*Backbiters*" are those who inflict wounds with their words... "*Inventors of evil things*" - Today, these folks work in Hollywood... "*Disobedient to parents*" - the disrespect for authority and idolization of youth is epidemic in our culture... "*Undiscerning*" is the failure to learn from the past, *un-teachable*... "*Untrustworthy*" is when people no longer honor

their agreements, and keep their promises - *that society is on its way to ruin!*

"Unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful..." It was said of Rome, "How pitiless she was! Amid all the ruins of her cities we find no hospital or orphanage - in an age that made many orphans. Rome had no conscience; she was a lustful, devouring beast, made more bestial by her intelligence and splendor." Rome is proof that anarchy and brutality await folks who have no heart.

Verse 32, *"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."* And Paul saved the worse indictment for last! Think of verse 32 the next time you sit down to watch an ungodly or unrighteous movie...

You may not cheat on your spouse, but do you cheer on the actor who does? You may not take God's name in vain, but do you watch movies that do it frequently?

Do we give placid approval to what God hates? It's called *"guilt by association"* and we need to repent!

In the day when pay phones were used, a man called his wife. When the conversation was over, and he'd hung up, the phone rang back... The man figured it was the operator telling him to insert another coin.

It was the operator, but she didn't say anything about money. This is what she said, "Sir, I thought you would just like to know that right after you hung up, your wife told you that she loved you." What a nice gesture!

And here's how we need to close Romans 1... Even though we live in a society that has hung up on God, He still calls. He wants us to know He loves us. And if we repent, He'll forgive... The Gospel of Christ is still in effect. It is the power of God to those who believe!