

PARADISE LOST

"YOU MAY HAVE YOUR WISH"

ROMANS 1:24-32

You've heard it said, "Be careful what you wish for." Commenting on objections to the doctrine of hell, C. S. Lewis writes: "Finally, it is objected that the ultimate loss of a single soul means the defeat of omnipotence. And so it does. In creating beings with free will, omnipotence from the outset submits to the possibility of such defeat. What you call defeat, I call miracle: for to make things which are not Itself, and thus to become, in a sense, capable of being resisted by its own handiwork, is the most astonishing and unimaginable of all the feats we attribute to the Deity. I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside. I do not mean that the ghosts may not wish to come out of hell, in the vague fashion wherein an envious man 'wishes' to be happy: but they certainly do not will even the first preliminary stages of that self-abandonment through which alone the soul can reach any good. They enjoy forever the horrible freedom *they have demanded*, and are therefore *self-enslaved* just as the blessed, forever submitting to obedience, become through all eternity more and more free.

"In the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell is itself a question: 'What are you asking God to do?' To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But He has done so, on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. To leave them alone? *Alas, I am afraid that is what He does*"

For the worship of idols is the beginning and cause and end of every evil.

– Wisdom of Solomon 14:27

(*The Problem of Pain*, 123-24, italics added).

Paul strikes a similar chord in Romans 1:18-27. People suppress the truth about God revealed in nature, namely "his eternal power and divine nature" (v. 20), even though it "is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them" (v. 19). They exchange worship of the immortal God for worship of mortal creatures (v. 23). Consequently, God gives them over to their idolatry and the consequences that brings (vv. 24-28). He permits them to engage in all kinds of sexual immorality, which carries its own "due penalty." What's more, he gives them over to a defective mind and the consequences that brings, namely a grocery list of self-destructive behaviors (vv. 29-32), which are all manifestations of four kinds of sinfulness: "wickedness, evil, greed and depravity" (v. 29).

This Week's Core Competency

Humanity – I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Nothing's perfect; nobody's perfect. Our world is nothing if not imperfect. By the way, that faint sound you hear in the background is the sound of creation groaning under the weight of sin's consequences. Paul writes in Romans 8:22, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies."

Should you doubt Paul's thesis in Romans 1:18-3:20—that everyone needs to have faith in Jesus Christ, because everyone needs "the righteousness from God . . . that is by faith from first to last" (1:17).

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Everyone needs this righteousness because "there is no one righteous, not even one" (3:10); "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23)—just read his list of familiar vices in 1:29-32. The ethical and moral misconduct listed there is so common, so all around us, that we take it for granted and summarily excuse it, especially in ourselves but not so much in others. Paul argues that people, who put God out of their lives, God gives over to defective minds (v. 28), which produce outrageously destructive conduct that corrupts humanity. About such people he says: "They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. 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." While people "who do such things" don't necessarily do them with the same frequency or with the same intensity, everyone does these things.

Vice and virtue live at opposite ends of the moral continuum, and we all find ourselves at different places along the continuum. Some of us are more virtuous than others, but none of us is perfect. And that's Paul's point.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Romans 1:24-32

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

26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

28 Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. 29 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, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. 32 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.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Box "therefore" indicating *result* in v. 24.
- * Double underline "God gave them over" in vv. 24, 26, 28.
- * Box "for" *explaining* "impurity" in v. 24.
- * Underline "exchanged" in vv. 25, 26 (cf., v. 23).
- * Bracket "truth about God" in v. 25.
- * Bracket "worshipped and served" in v. 25.

- * Box "because" indicating *reason* in v. 26.
- * Circle "natural" and "unnatural" in vv. 26, 27.
- * Circle "due penalty" in v. 27.
- * Box "just as . . . so" indicating *comparison* in v. 28.
- * Circle "depraved mind" in v. 28.
- * Box "so that" indicating *purpose* in v. 28.
- * Highlight v. 29a.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. "Therefore" links verses 24-27 to verses 18-23. How so?
2. "God gave them over" (vv. 24, 26). Put what that means in your own words.
3. Paul links idolatry to "sexual impurity" (v. 24) and "shameful lusts" (v. 26). Describe the implied connection between idolatry and immorality.
4. Do you think the same connection exists today? Explain.
5. People swapped "the truth of God for a lie" (v. 25). Put what that means in your own words.
6. Paul condemns same-sex sexual relationships as *unnatural*. But they are not unnatural for gay and lesbian people, are they? So, does his condemnation still apply? Explain.
7. To what might the "due penalty" for homosexual practices (v. 27) refer?
8. God gives people who renounce him over to a "depraved" or defective mind. So what?
9. **Discussion:** People are filled with every kind of "wickedness, evil, greed and depravity" (v. 29). Does that mean that everyone is filled with every kind? Talk about it.

Paul opens the body of his letter to the Romans, which is about the gospel of God's Son, by revealing humanity's universal need for it (1:18-3:23). Everyone needs to hear the gospel and have faith in Jesus Christ, because everyone needs "the righteousness from God . . . that is by faith from first to last" (1:17). Everyone needs this righteousness because "there is no one righteous, not even one" (3:10); "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23).

Romans 1:24-32 belongs to his initial indictment of humanity (vv. 18-32). The apostle points out how people's suppression of the truth about God as revealed in nature has led to terrible distortions of the natural order and to the worship of what God has created instead of the Creator himself (1:23, 25), bringing with it dire unintended and unforeseen consequences. He explains that instead of glorifying him as God and giving him thanks, they "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles" (v. 23) and in the process became fools. God's wrath is being revealed against them (v. 18) in that they face the harsh real-life implications of living without him.

"Therefore" in verse 24 indicates that Paul picks up where he left off in verse 23, continuing the argument that begins in verse 18 and runs to verse 32. The repeated use of "exchanged" (vv. 23, 25) and "God gave them over" (vv. 24, 26, 28) is helpful in tracing his argument. According to verse 23, Gentiles "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles." Consequently, "God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another" (v. 24). Then according to verse 25, Gentiles "exchanged the truth of God for a lie." Consequently, "God gave them over to shameful lusts" (v. 26).

One commentator explains: "So here vv. 24 and 26 hold the key to understanding this segment of the text. Because of pagan idolatry, God has given up Gentiles to the ethical consequences of their actions-to unclean and degrading behavior. Bad theology or worship, in a morally structure universe, leads to bad ethics. God's wrath is seen not so much in what he does, but in what he allows to happen. 'He gave them up,' says Paul repeatedly, probably echoing Ps. 106:41. Degrading worship leads to debauchery of the individual and

to his or her ethical demise, and so there are both vertical and horizontal dimensions to sin" (Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 65).

"God gave them over" is repeated once more in verse 28. This time in connection with the fact that Gentiles "did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God." Their wrongheaded thinking provoked God to give them over to a defective mind that would continue to make wrongheaded ethical decisions. "As people *disapproved* of the idea of retaining God in their thinking, so God gave them over to a *disapproved* mind (v. 28)" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Romans," 2017 ed., 33, www.soniclight.com). What follows is a "vice list" like those found elsewhere in Paul's letters (cf., Gal 5:19-21; Col 3:5, 8; 1Ti 1:9-10; 2Ti 3:2-4). The mental vacuum created by dismissing God is filled with four forms of active sin: "wickedness, evil, greed and depravity" (v. 29a). These four in turn express themselves in 17 more specific types of wickedness (vv. 29b-31), none of which are unfamiliar.

Without God, people, whether ancient or modern, are left with a defective moral compass that inevitably leads them into self-destructive behavior. Put differently, their sense of values become distorted, because they have abandoned God, the one and only firm reference point in whom all other shifting relativities of meaning and worth become stable and clear.

On the connection between idolatry and immorality, Jews agreed that the one begets the other. The Wisdom of Solomon, written at the end of the first century B.C., declares "For the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication, and the invention of them was the corruption of life" (14:12), for idol worshipers "Whether they kill children in their initiations, or celebrate secret mysteries, or hold frenzied revels with strange custom, they no longer keep either their lives or their marriages pure, but they either treacherously kill one another, or grieve one another by adultery, and all is a raging riot of blood and murder, theft and deceit, corruption, faithlessness, tumult, perjury, confusion over what is good, forgetfulness of favors, pollution of souls, sex perversion, disorder in marriage, adultery, and debauchery. For the worship of idols not to be named is the beginning and cause and end of every evil" (vv. 23-27). No wonder idolatry is mocked by the prophet Isaiah (44:9-20).

day 4 **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

The Message of the Passage

Because people exchange the truth of God for a lie and choose to live without him, he retributes them by permitting them to pursue their immoral ways and their wrongheaded self-destructive conduct.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on the message of Romans 1:1-7 and your response to it.

Do you think Paul is being too harsh in his description of humanity? Explain why or why not.

Describe the impact his description has on your motivation to share the gospel?

Can you imagine yourself doing anything *in particular* in response to the message of this passage?

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 24 **therefore** "The opening word 'therefore' carries the reader all the way back to the mention of the revelation of God's wrath, taking in also what lies between" (Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10:24). "God's 'handing over' of human beings is his response to their culpable rejection of the knowledge of himself that he has made generally available (vv. 21-23)" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 110).

v. 24 **God gave them over** Cf., Ps 81:12. God permitted, rather than encouraged or forced. "God gave them over" becomes a refrain (vv. 24, 26, 28) . . . The same expression is used of God's judgment on Israel for idolatry (Acts 7:42) . . . We are not told how this giving over was implemented, but most likely we are to think of it in negative terms-i.e., that God simply took his hands off and let willful rejection of himself produce its ugly result in human life" (Harrison, 24). "God has handed them over in the sense that he has accepted the fact of man's rebellious desire to be free of God, and has let go of the control which restrained them from their baser instincts. The rationale is, presumably, that God does not retain control over those who do not desire it; he who wants to be on his own is granted his wish" (James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38a, *Romans 1-8*, 62-63).

v. 24 **for** Lit., "to dishonor their bodies among them" (NET). The nuance of this clause is ambiguous. "Does it indicate the purpose for which God handed people over? Its result? Or does it simply give a fuller definition of the word 'uncleanness'? [cf., 'impurity'] Certainty is impossible, but the last is probably the best option" (111-12).

v. 25 **exchanged** Lit., "who exchanged" (NKJV); cf., "because they exchanged" (ESV, NRSV). Although verses 24-25 comprise one sentence in Greek, since the reason for God giving them over is expressed in verse 23, many English translations begin a new sentence in verse 25 (see Moo, 112). Other translations render the verb translated "exchanged" in the NIV "traded" (NLT) or even "swapped" (NTE).

v. 25 **truth about God** Lit., "truth of God" (NET). The NIV interprets the phrase to refer to "the truth God has made known, which belongs to him" (cf., John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 45). On the other hand, it may refer to "the reality, the fact of God as he has revealed himself" (Moo, 112). In either case, idolatry is the lie that flies in the face of the fact that God is Creator, not creature, and that God is real, and idols are not.

v. 25 **worshipped and** "Worship and serve may be rendered as 'worship and obey' or 'worship and do reverence to.' Serve translates the most general Greek term for religious activity in honor of a deity" (Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 26). "The two verbs are mutually interpreting and together sum up all that is involved in the veneration of idols. It is this putting some aspect of God's creation—whether it be an animal, a human, or a material object-in place of God that is the essence of idolatry" (Moo, 113).

v. 26 **natural, unnatural** "The concept is primarily Greek, and typically Stoic—to live in harmony with the natural order and its divine rationality" (Dunn, 64). "But Paul's use of the word 'nature' in this verse probably owes much to Jewish authors . . . In keeping with the biblical and Jewish worldview, the heterosexual desires observed normally in nature are traced to God's creative intent. Sexual sins that are 'against nature' are also, then, against God, and it is this close association that makes it probable that Paul's appeal to 'nature' in this verse includes appeal to God's created order . . . It is clear that Paul depicts homosexual activity as a violation of God's created order, another indication of the departure from true knowledge and worship of God" (Moo, 115). "Vv. 26-27 are about as clear a condemnation of homosexual and lesbian behavior as exists in the NT. Paul speaks of actions, not inclinations, attitudes, or genetics. He says quite literally that those who practice such behavior have exchanged the natural function of intercourse for that which is against nature. In both Jewish and Greco-Roman tradition there was a long history of seeing such behavior as 'unnatural' or counter to the way God originally created and intended things to be" (Witherington, 69).

v. 27 **penalty** "In bringing this discussion to a close, the apostle uses two expressions, 'received' and 'due penalty,' which in the original involve the idea of recompense, the punishment being in keeping with the offense. These terms serve to underscore the principle of *lex talionis* contained in the words 'Because of this, God gave them over' . . . Sexual deviation contains in itself a recompense, a punishment for the abandonment of God and his ways" (Harrison, 25). "In claiming that this penalty for homosexual practice is received 'in themselves,' Paul may suggest that the sexual perversion itself is the punishment" (Moo, 116).

v. 28 **depraved mind** Or "defective mind." "People who have refused to acknowledge God end up with minds that are 'disqualified' from being able to understand and acknowledge the will of God. The result, of course, is that they do things that are 'not proper'" (Moo, 118).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Our text this week is a tragic indictment on humanity. We are guilty as charged - hopeless and lost in our sin. If the story ended there it would be devastating. Praise the Lord, it doesn't. Jesus has made a way for us to be reconciled to the Father. He has imparted His righteousness to us and we can stand before God not as condemned but loved and accepted. Unfortunately, we still live in a fallen world that continually assaults us and beckons us to sin. How can we, as parents, lead our kids to pursue righteousness and reject sin? We can knit our kids' hearts to the Word. Psalm 119 reminds us that the way a young person keeps his way pure is by living according to God's Word (verse 9). The psalmist knew this is easier said than done. How can we (and our kids) live according to God's Word? First, we ask God to help us. In verse 10, the psalmist pleads with God to help him not stray from His commands. Next, he fills his mind with God's Word. The discipline of scripture memory is extremely important. Next, the psalmist praises God for His help. In verse 14, he rejoices in obeying God's Word. That is our goal, parents. We desire for our kids to delight in following God. All of these disciplines are better caught than taught. Praying for you as you model Christ following to your child.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Romans 1:28-32

1. What happened to those who "did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God"?
2. According to verse 32, what do those who disobey God deserve?

What Do You Think

Read through the list of sins listed in verses 29-31. Sometimes it's easier to see sin in other people than in our own lives. Is there a sin on that list you need to repent of and ask God to forgive you for?

What R U Going To Do

One way for us to avoid sin is to be in God's Word often. Find a calendar in your house and mark each day that you read your Bible. If you mark at least 5 days this week, let your small group leader know for 3 extra tokens!

Core Comp

Humanity - I believe God loves everyone and we all need Jesus as Savior.

Memory Verse

Romans 2:7 - *To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed Scrolls _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade _____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money 2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians 6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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