

“The Black Velvet Backdrop” (Romans 1:18–32)

A young man walked into a jewelry store to shop for an engagement ring. Standing nervously at the counter, he peered through the glass top at a tray of beautiful gems. The salesman brought out some of his finer diamonds and held each precious jewel up to the light. The diamonds were quality stones, but the young man wasn't impressed. None of them caught his eye. Realizing he needed a new approach, the salesman pulled a black velvet pad out of the drawer and placed it on the counter. Using his tweezers, he delicately picked up one of his choicest stones and laid it on the black backdrop. As he did so, all the light in the room seemed to pour through the stone causing it to shine as it had never shone before. The man was dazzled. He had seen this very diamond moments earlier, but not like this. All the beauty of this precious stone was now dramatically enhanced and clearly showcased for him to behold. Noting his approval to the salesman the man said that this was the diamond he wanted to purchase.

What changed the man's view of the diamond? Why did the costly gem, which only moments before had appeared so unimpressive, now sparkle like the stars above on a moonless night? In the jewelry business, the dark background makes all the difference. When placed on a glass counter, the black velvet causes the light overhead to radiate brilliantly through the stone, revealing its true beauty and causing it to sparkle and shine more brightly. Remove the black backdrop, and it's difficult to see the diamond's splendor. It's the darkness that causes the stone to burst forth with dazzling light. The same principle can be applied to the spiritual realm. In order to fully appreciate God's love, we must examine it against the black backdrop of His wrath. The blackness of God's wrath showcases the flawless gem of His great love toward us. But remove the black backdrop of His wrath, and our appreciation of the brilliance of His amazing love fades.

The gem of Romans is the gospel—the good news. However, before we can *fully* understand and appreciate the good news we must understand the bad news that Paul presents in 1:18–3:20.¹ The theme of this section is that everybody everywhere is condemned before God. Therefore, Paul makes his greatest attempt to get us lost in our sin so that we can then be found. He wants us to emerge from this section with a feeling of utter desperation. Not a little guilt, but absolute desperation!² Have you ever heard the expression, “Hunger is the best cook?” That's a true statement, isn't it? Well, my purpose in the next five sermons will be to get you famished—famished for God's love. In 1:18–32, Paul uses a broad brush to paint the portrait of human wickedness.³ This text teaches: *When we sin God says, “Have it your way.”* Yes, that's right; Burger King® plagiarized God in their slogan. In this section, Paul discloses two sobering realities.

1. We have willfully and foolishly rejected God (1:18–23). Paul demonstrates that when we reject God as Creator we turn to idolatry and are ultimately without excuse. In 1:18, Paul issues a summary statement for 1:18–32, and perhaps for all of 1:18–3:20: **“For⁴ the wrath of God is revealed⁵ from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in⁶ unrighteousness.”⁷** Paul begins his discussion with “the wrath of God.” Obviously, this is not a popular concept. Yet, since the Bible doesn't shy away from this topic neither must we.⁸ Simply put, God's wrath is His holy hatred of sin.⁹ But God's wrath is very different from our wrath. God doesn't fly off the handle and “go off” on people. He simply reacts to sin. In our previous ministry, Lori and I served in Corvallis, OR, which is located in the Willamette Valley. The Willamette Valley has the second highest grass pollen count in the entire world. When we arrived, I began to have all kinds of problems. My eyes became bloodshot and would run with tears. I would sneeze throughout the day. I experienced constant congestion. This would last from March through October. As a result, I had to have shots twice a week. What was the problem? I was allergic to pollen. My body naturally and violently reacted to pollen. Similarly, the Bible teaches that God is so holy that He naturally and violently reacts to sin. He can't help Himself; He's just plain allergic to sin! Hence, one of the greatest truths we can come to grips with is how much God hates sin. When you and I understand the utter wickedness of sin, we will appreciate God's wrath.

Paul states that God's wrath is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness. This is particularly evident in those who continually "suppress [or hold down¹⁰] the truth." Please note the phrase "the truth." God believes in absolute truth; He objects to relative truth. He states that people suppress what they know to be true. In this context, the truth is that there *is* a God. The German philosopher Frederick Nietzsche (1844–1900) wrote, "If you could prove God to me, I'd believe Him all the less." This is what it means to suppress the truth.¹¹ We must pray for our unsaved loved ones to have soft hearts that are responsive to spiritual truth. We must also pray that we don't harden our hearts and suppress God's truth in our lives.¹²

In 1:19–20 Paul now explains the reason that God's wrath is revealed: ". . . **because¹³ that which is known¹⁴ about God is¹⁵ evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.**"¹⁶ One way God reveals Himself is through His creation.¹⁷ Unfortunately, Paul emphasizes that even though all people know God as Creator, they reject Him. The term "known" (*gnostos*) means "capable of being known, intelligible."¹⁸ Paul uses the noun "evident" (*phaneros*) and the verb "to make evident" (*phaneroo*) to emphasize that God has revealed Himself. These words mean "evident so as to be readily known."¹⁹ So basically God says, "They know. I know they know, and they know they know."²⁰ Paul even states that this knowledge has been evident "since the creation of the world" (1:20a). The invisible God is visible through His creation.²¹ God's "eternal power" is evidenced by the fact of His creation. God's "divine nature" is evidenced by the fact that His creation is a created order, and not random chaos. This implies that God has a character, which gives order and purpose to creation. Please notice that Paul states that the truth of God in nature has been "clearly seen, being understood through what has been made" (1:20b). The two verbs in this verse are very important. "Clearly seen" (*kathorao*) means that everyone has seen something of God's handiwork in the world. "Understood" (*noeo*) is even stronger. It means that the revelation of God in nature strikes the heart of every man. Understand that Paul isn't suggesting that nature contains a revelation about God which every man may see. That's not strong enough. Paul is saying that every man actually sees the revelation and every man actually understands it to some degree.²² This is why Paul can say in 1:20b that man is "without excuse."

Have you ever been to Mount Rushmore near Keystone, South Dakota? I have, and I will never forget it. Mount Rushmore is a huge sculpture of the heads of four Presidents (Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Roosevelt).²³ Each head is sixty feet high! Now suppose you visited this mountain for the very first time and no one told you anything about how the heads were formed. What would you think? (A) You would think that the heads were formed by chance. The sculpture somehow just happened. (B) You would think that all the forces of nature (wind, rain, sleet, snow, etc.) had their effect upon this mountain for thousands and thousands of years until finally the rocks were accidentally shaped in just the right way. (C) You would realize that intelligent men must have formed and carved out such a massive sculpture. By simply looking at Mount Rushmore you could learn certain things about the men who formed and carved it (even though you had never seen or met these men). (1) These men must have had *intelligence* to be able to plan and design such a monument. (2) These men must have had *wisdom* to be able to carry out such a great project. Indeed, it took more than six years to complete. (3) These men must have had *power* to be able to carve into hard granite (using dynamite, etc.). (4) These men must have had *skill* to be able to transform a rugged cliff into an artistic masterpiece. In the same way, by simply looking at creation, we can learn many things about the Creator. He is a God of power, wisdom, order, and beauty. Moreover, we are able to conclude that this Supreme Being deserves our worship and obedience. These facts explain why in every culture there is some belief in a Supreme Being. It is obvious that there is a God.²⁴

No matter how you ponder creation, God is knowable and evident. When I was growing up I was a big sports fan. I collected the autographs of famous athletes. These autographs represented the value of the athletes. Likewise, all of creation bears God's autograph. When God wants to show off His glory and power, He points to creation. The design of creation points to the Master Designer—God.

If time permitted, I'd love to share with you about the complexity of the human cell, the intricacies of the human eye, and the immensity of the sun. I could spend hours talking about God's creative genius. However, let me tell you about my experience last week at the Texas State Fair. After walking around the fair for several hours, Lori and I came across a sign that said, "Petting Zoo." I got excited because prior to becoming a pastor, I wanted to be a zookeeper who worked with chimpanzees or orangutans. (I guess you could say that I'm living my dream.) Since I've been to a number of zoos, I didn't think that this petting zoo would be much different. I was forgetting that everything is bigger and better in Texas. As we walked into the zoo, I looked to the right and there was a giraffe. I got so excited. I told Lori, "It's a giraffe! Can you believe it?" I then saw zebras, kangaroos, donkeys, camels, Texas Longhorns, and yaks. There were scores of animals that I didn't even recognize. Yet, inside that smelly petting zoo I was awed by God's creativity, His beauty, His majesty, and His power. Creation sings and shouts that there is a God.

Tragically, when we reject God we inevitably worship a substitute. This is called idolatry. In 1:21–23, Paul testifies: **"For even though they knew God, they did not honor [glorify²⁵] Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile²⁶ in their speculations,²⁷ and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."**²⁸ Paul asserts that humankind *does* know God (1:21). His power and glory are apparent and irrefutable.²⁹ How do we respond to this revelation? With a failure to honor God and give Him thanks.³⁰ Failing to glorify God is the root sin.³¹ We were created to glorify God. It is our ultimate mission in life. Thanksgiving is also central to the worship of God.³² Martin Luther (1483–1546) claimed that ingratitude is the root of all evil.³³ How true! Even as a believer, I am guilty of ingratitude. You are too. How often have we refused to acknowledge God for the great God He is? How many times have we failed to give thanks? Who are some people in your life that you can be thankful for? What are some possessions in your life that you can be grateful for? Have you expressed thanks to God. When we refuse to give God thanks there are mental and moral consequences. The mental consequence is that men "became futile in their speculations." The moral consequence was that their hearts were "darkened." Paul also tells us that the appearance of intellectualism is in reality a sham (1:22–23). The supposed wisdom is, in reality, foolishness. This reflects the wisdom of Psalm 14:1a: "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Tragically, God has been "exchanged." We've taken Him back like a Christmas present that doesn't fit and we've said, "We want our money back." This is the great insanity of idolatry.³⁴ It's possible that you, too, are guilty of idolatry and you don't even realize it. (1) Is there an object, person, or activity in your life that's a substitute for God? (2) Are your affections centered on something God has created rather than God the Creator? (3) Does this activity prevent or replace your love for God? (4) Is there something you worship more than God?³⁵ If you respond honestly to these questions, you may have recognized the idolatry that exists within you. Commit yourself right now to forsake idolatry. Begin this process by exposing your idol to another person. Request prayer and press on in the worship of God.

[When humankind rejects God's revelation, God responds in a very surprising way.]

2. God deliberately gives us what we want (1:24–32).³⁶ When we refuse to glorify God and give Him thanks, God gives us over to our sin. In other words, the penalty for sin is more sin. The first result of idolatry is found in 1:24–27: God gives us over to sexual sin. Paul writes, **"Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity,³⁷ so that their bodies would be dishonored among them."** Please notice that it was God who gave us over (see 1:24, 26, 28). When we reject God, He gives us over to sexual immorality. Although many folks think this is a dream come true—this dream leads to death (cf. Jas 1:14–15). Once the "passing pleasures of sin" (Heb 11:25) are over there is loneliness, emptiness, guilt, and many other potential emotional, mental, and physical consequences. If you're committing sexual immorality, stop in your tracks. Repent of your sin and return to a lifestyle of purity. While God is a God of grace, He's also a God of wrath.³⁸ Consequently, He will exercise His present tense wrath (cf. 1:18) in an attempt to get us sick of ourselves.³⁹ Even this is an expression of His love.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, the tendency of humankind is to ignore God's love and to play once again by their rules. Verse 25 serves as a parenthetical statement to tie 1:24 and 26–27 back to the idolatry of 1:21–23. In 1:25, the response of humankind is to exalt the creature over God. Paul writes, **“For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator,⁴¹ who is blessed forever. Amen.”** This verse states that man “exchanged the truth of God for a lie.” If you have a center column or side column reference Bible, you can see that the phrase “a lie” is literally translated “the lie.”⁴² This begs the question: “What lie is Paul referring to?” I believe the lie that Paul has in mind is the first lie—the mother of all lies that began in the garden. The lie is godship, that we are the masters of our fate, the captain of our souls. This is a satanic deception straight out of hell. I believe that the worst time in our history was the period of “Higher Criticism of the Bible” (1800s to the present) where man stood over the Scriptures and decided what parts were true and what parts were false. People slowly lost confidence that you could trust God's Word. Consequently, the creature became exalted over the Creator. There was role reversal of the most demonic sort. When this happened it can be legitimately said that man “worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.” Once God is brought down to creature level, the creature is then worshipped above God. Yet, even in the midst of penning this atrocious account, Paul bursts out into praise over God the Creator: “who is blessed forever. Amen.” What an example for you and me! When we read the Word there should be occasions when we break out into praise.

In 1:26–27 we come to the hot topic of homosexuality.⁴³ Honestly, I'm not interested in what various denominations, pastors, and scholars say about homosexuality. I'm also not interested in how particular politicians view homosexuality. My chief concern is: What does the Bible say about homosexuality? Let's read these verses carefully. **“For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another,⁴⁴ men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.”** Paul's view of homosexuality seems rather clear. He refers to the practice of homosexuality as “degrading,”⁴⁵ “unnatural,” and “indecent,” and “error.”⁴⁶ Whether our country likes it or not, whether we like it or not, the Bible considers homosexuality sin.⁴⁷ It's not an alternative lifestyle. God calls it sin throughout the Bible, and so must we.⁴⁸ It's not a hate crime to say so; it would be a biblical crime to not say so. If we're to be Christ followers we must tow this line. But we must do so with compassion and sensitivity. We must be careful to not suggest that the sin of homosexuality is worse than any other sin. Homosexuality is only one of many unclean or dishonoring sexual practices. Many Christians can be downright brutal. We go off on this sin because it's one that many of us don't struggle with. However, in 1 Corinthians 6, Paul lumps the homosexual and the coveter together. Have you ever wanted something that doesn't belong to you? If so, then you are covetous, and so am I. In God's sight, we're no worse or better than the homosexual. We must avoid being judgmental (see Rom 2:1–11). Instead, we ought to spend more time striving against our own sin rather than pointing the finger at someone else's sin. We must seek to share Christ with homosexuals and lesbians and let the Holy Spirit work His change in their lives. Additionally, fathers, don't ever shy away from expressing your love to your boys. Lavish love on your boys both physically and verbally. Don't be afraid to hug and kiss them. Always tell them how wonderful they are and how much you love them. This is one of the greatest ways that I know to ensure that your boys have healthy, God-honoring relationships with other men. Obviously, this principle applies to mothers and daughters as well. But it's especially critical between fathers and sons because statistically, men are three times more prone to adopt a homosexual lifestyle than women.

As we wrap up these verses, it is worth noting that Paul does not specify what the “penalty” received is.⁴⁹ Though many Christians like to infer from this that the current AIDS epidemic (or more recent outbreak of deadly staph infections among homosexual men), this is uncertain.⁵⁰ Paul merely notes that the penalty of their delusion is received “in their own persons” (*en heautois*). I believe he is referring to the gnawing, unsatisfied lust itself, along with the dreadful physical and moral consequences of sexual promiscuity.⁵¹ In either case, the consequences are severe.⁵² *When we sin God says, “Have it your way.” Beware!*

The second result of idolatry is found in 1:28–32: God gives us over to every manner of sin. In 1:28, Paul writes, **“And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind,⁵³ to do those things which are not proper.”** Previously, Paul has said that God is “known,” “evident,” “clearly seen,” and “understood” (1:19–20). Yet, humankind refuses to even “acknowledge” (*echo*: “to have, hold”) God any longer. Their response is to dismiss God altogether. The result is dreadful: utter mental and moral darkness. This leads to a vice list of twenty-one different sins in 1:29–31. This is the most comprehensive list of sins in the entire New Testament. As you look through this vice list, please notice that many of these sins are fairly acceptable in the Christian community.⁵⁴ Sins like greed, envy, strife, gossip, slander, arrogance, and my personal favorite—disobedience to parents—are common traits of many Christians and are found in every church. Yet Paul says that these behaviors are sin, and he cleverly links these acts with homosexuality, murder, idolatry, and every form of wickedness. This should change the way that we view sin. We are without excuse. Paul has leveled the playing field. This should humble us all and motivate us to achieve a new standard of holiness. We are to be holy as He is holy (cf. 1 Pet 1:15–16).⁵⁵

Paul concludes this passage by hitting way too close to home. In 1:32 he writes, **“Although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”** Paul concludes by echoing a form of the verb “know” (*epiginosko*) from 1:19 and 21. Our tendency to rebel against the knowledge of God has been evident throughout this passage (1:18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 28). Even though we know the truth, we tend to rebel against it. This is where we are at as a nation right now. As a result, God’s wrath is being revealed all over the place. We have idols everywhere we look. We’re trying to legalize homosexual marriage. Our TV talk show hosts are trotting out the most perverted guests they can find and the audience claps and roars at what they’re doing. The New English Bible captures the forcefulness of Paul’s idea when it translates the phrase as “they actually *applaud* such practices.” This is the wrath of God. God has backed off and has allowed the world to go stark raving mad! George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950), the famous playwright and theater critic, said it well, “Earth is the place other planets send their insane.” Of course, when God gives people over and puts into motion His wrath, it doesn’t matter who’s in the White House or who’s on the city council or who’s on the school board. It’s irrelevant because when the wrath of God is your problem, the goodness of God is your only solution.

As we close, I want to take us back to 1:18. Please notice the first word of this passage. The word “for” (*gar*) is important because it links 1:18 and following to 1:16–17 and gives a reason for it. The gospel is necessary because there is such a thing as the wrath of God and only the gospel brings deliverance from His wrath. I also would like to draw your attention back to the word translated “gave over” (*paradidomi*). As I stated earlier, the verb “gave over” is used three times (1:24, 26, 28). As I studied this word, I found something interesting. This word isn’t found again until 4:25 where Jesus Christ is “given over” or “delivered” for our sins. That’s good news! We have a future hope. Why? Because as Martin Luther said, “God is not hostile to sinners, but only to unbelievers.” Will you believe the gospel? Will you receive Jesus Christ’s provision for your sin today?

Copyright © 2010 Keith R. Krell. All rights reserved. All Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from the New American Standard Bible, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1977, and 1995 by The Lockman Foundation, and are used by permission.

Permissions: Feel free to reproduce and distribute any materials written by Keith Krell, in part or in whole, in any format, provided that you do not alter the wording in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. It is our desire to spread this information, not protect or restrict it. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Keith Krell, Timeless Word Ministries, 2508 State Ave NE Olympia, WA 98506, 360-352-9044.

Scripture References

Romans 1:18–32

Psalm 19:1–4

Psalm 14:1; 111:10

Isaiah 44:9–20

Matthew 11:20–24

Genesis 19:1–28; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Deuteronomy 23:17–18

Genesis 6:5; Acts 17:23–31

Study Questions

1. Does the concept of God’s wrath offend or embarrass me (Romans 1:18–20)? If so, why? Can I discern my rationale and motives? What troubles me? How would I explain the biblical teaching of God’s wrath to an unbeliever? How would I bring in the concepts of God’s love and grace?
2. How have I seen God’s handiwork “evident” in creation (Romans 1:18–20)? When have I been most aware of God’s creative genius and power? Do I take time to worship God in His creation? How can I encourage others to worship God in creation?
3. Why are “glorifying God” and “giving thanks” such fundamental issues to God (Romans 1:21)? In what specific areas of my life have I failed to glorify God and give Him thanks? How can I practice these disciplines more faithfully? Who is a shining example of these disciplines?
4. Is there an object, person, or activity in my life that is a substitute for God (Romans 1:22–23)? Are my affections centered on something God has created rather than God the Creator? Does this activity prevent or replace my love for God? Is there something I worship more than God?
5. Which of the following results of sin hits especially close to home: darkened hearts (Romans 1:24–25), degraded passions (26–27), or depraved mind (28–32)? Which of the twenty–one vice list sins do I struggle with the most? How can I overcome this area of personal struggle or addiction? What mature believer can help me?

Notes

¹ Moo writes: “Paul implicitly acknowledges that 1:18–3:20 is an interruption in his exposition of the righteousness of God by reprising 1:17 in 3:21 . . . Some think that the ‘revelation of God’s wrath’ is a product of the preaching of the gospel, so that 1:18–3:20 is as much ‘gospel’ as is 3:21–4:25 . . . But, although Paul clearly considers warning about judgment to come to be related to his preaching of the gospel (2:16), his generally positive use of ‘gospel’ language forbids us from considering God’s wrath and judgment to be *part of* the gospel. We must consider 1:18–3:20 as a preparation for, rather than as part of, Paul’s exposition of the gospel of God’s righteousness.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*. New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 92.

² Hart rightly notes, “The diagnosis is before the prescription.” John Hart, “The Letter to the Romans,” unpublished class notes (2010 ed.), Moody Bible Institute. Stifler puts it like this: “Sin is the measure of salvation. Only they know what it is to be saved who know what it is to be lost. All heresy has its source in wrong or feeble conceptions of sin.” James M. Stifler, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Chicago: Moody, 1960), 29.

³ For the role of Rom 1:18–32 versus 2:1–16, see the excellent work of Bob Deffinbaugh, “The Present Wrath of God” (Rom 1:15–32): www.bible.org/seriespage/present-wrath-god-romans-115-32.

⁴ The connection is weakened in the NIV because of the failure to translate the conjunction *gar* (“for”).

⁵ The verb “revealed” (*apokalupto*) is the first word in the Greek text for the purpose of emphasis. The form of the verb (*apokaluptetai*) is a present passive indicative, indicating that the revelation is continual and that it is being done by God.

⁶ The word “in” (*en*) is used in an instrumental fashion and is better rendered “by means of.” Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 103 n. 51.

⁷ Whereas “the righteousness of God” is presently revealed in the gospel (Rom 1:17), “the wrath of God” is presently revealed in nature. See Harold W. Hoehner, “Romans” in *The Bible Knowledge Word Study* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 2006), 130.

⁸ Packer writes, “People who do not actually read the Bible confidently assure us that when we move from the Old Testament to the New, the theme of divine judgment fades into the background; but if we examine the New Testament, even in the most cursory way, we find at once that the Old Testament emphasis on God’s action as Judge, far from being reduced, is actually intensified. The entire New Testament is overshadowed by the certainty of a coming day of universal judgment, and by the problem that it raises: how may we sinners get right with God while there is yet time?” J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 137. Pink wrote, “A study of the concordance will show that there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of God than there are to His love and tenderness.” A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 82.

⁹ Michael Eaton, *Romans*, forthcoming. Packer, defines it well, “God’s wrath is His righteousness reacting against unrighteousness.” J. I. Packer, *In My Place Condemned He Stood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 40–41. Murray defines it as “the holy revulsion of God’s being against that which is the contradiction of his holiness.” John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 35. Stott defines God’s wrath in this way: “The wrath of God, then, is almost totally different from human anger. It does not mean that God loses his temper, flies into a rage, or is ever malicious, spiteful or vindictive. The alternative to ‘wrath’ is not ‘love’ but ‘neutrality’ in the moral conflict. And God is not neutral. On the contrary, his wrath is his holy hostility to evil, his refusal to condone it or come to terms with it, his just judgment upon it.” John R. W. Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 72. Cranfield puts it well: “His wrath is not something which is inconsistent with his love; on the contrary, it is an expression of his love. It is precisely because he loves us truly and seriously and faithfully that he is with us in our sinfulness.” C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. ICC series (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 29.

¹⁰ BDAG s.v. *katecho* 1b. The present active participle refers to a suppression that is a continual and aggressive striving against the truth.

¹¹ Paul isn’t speaking of God’s eternal wrath as expressed in hell; rather he is referring to God’s present wrath on earth. The conjunction *gar* (“for”) provides a clear connection between Rom 1:17 and 18. See also Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 100; René A. Lopez, “Do Believers Experience the Wrath of God?” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 15:29 (Autumn 2002): 45–66.

¹² See Heb 3:8, 15; 4:7.

¹³ The word translated “because” (*dioti*) is a combination of two common conjunctions: *dia* (“on account of”) and *hoti* (“because”). It has the sense of “in as much as” or “in light of the fact that.” BDAG s.v. *dioti* 3: “marker used to indicate why something just stated can reasonably be considered valid.”

¹⁴ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 103 n. 55 makes a good case that context here demands “that which can be known,” rather than “that which *is* known.” Either sense is possible (see BDAG s.v. *gnostos* 1–2), and since Paul explicitly mentions what is known about God in 1:21 it seems best to adopt BDAG definition 2, “what can be known.”

¹⁵ Paul emphatically includes the state of being verb *estin* (“is”) here.

¹⁶ The phrase “without excuse” (*anapologetos*) is literally “no legal defense.” This Greek term (*a plus apologeomai*) is used only here and in Rom 2:1 in the NT.

¹⁷ See Ps 19:1–6: “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world, and their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; it rejoices as a strong man to run his course. Its rising is from one end of the heavens, and its circuit to the other end of them; and there is nothing hidden from its heat.”

¹⁸ BDAG s.v. *gnostos* 2.

¹⁹ BDAG s.v. *phaneros* 1: “pertaining to being evident so as to be readily known, *visible, clear, plainly to be seen, open, plain, evident, known*”; BDAG s.v. *phaneroo* 2a: “to cause to become known, *disclose, show, make known*.”

²⁰ Jan Hettinga, *Follow Me: Experience the Loving Leadership of Jesus* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1996), 81.

²¹ Stott writes: “The creation is a visible disclosure of the invisible God, an intelligible disclosure of the otherwise unknown God. Just as artists reveal themselves in what they draw, paint and sculpt, so the Divine Artist has revealed himself in his creation.” Stott, *Romans*, 73.

²² Paul in his preaching once appealed to this fact. “God . . . made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them,” he said, and went on to make the point that He “did not leave himself without a witness” (Acts 14:15, 17; cf. 17:23–29).

²³ See www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Rushmore.

²⁴ Revised and adapted from Romans Chapter 1: www.middletonbiblechurch.org/romans/romans1.htm.

²⁵ The Greek verb is *doxazo* = “to glorify”

²⁶ The word “futile” (*mataioo*) is not used elsewhere in the NT.

²⁷ The word “speculations” (*dialogismos*) means reasonings. We get our word “dialogue” from it. When a person begins to debate back and forth the pros and cons of an issue, if his reasonings are futile, that means that he loses his power to weigh what is of primary importance and what is secondary.

²⁸ Foolishness leads to idolatry (see Jer 10:14 LXX; cf. Isa 19:11). Pao notes, “This verse alludes to Psalm 106:20, a verse that in turn points back to the worship of the golden calf at Sinai (Exod 32:1–34).” David W. Pao, *Thanksgiving: An investigation of a Pauline theme*. NSBT (Leicester, England: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 97.

²⁹ Stott, *Romans*, 76; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 119–20.

³⁰ Nygren writes, “A wrong relation to God is the ultimate cause of man’s corruption.” Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1949), 101.

³¹ Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 87.

³² Hart, “The Letter to the Romans.”

³³ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*. Trans. W. Pauck (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 26.

³⁴ Isaiah captures the foolishness of idolatry when he speaks of kindling a fire with part of the tree and making a god to worship with the rest of it (Isa 44:15–17). Psalm 135:18 states, “Those who make them [idols] will be like them, *Yes*, everyone who trusts in them.”

³⁵ Hart, “The Letter to the Romans.”

³⁶ Schreiner, *Romans*, 83 notes that the threefold usage of *paredoken* (“he gave over”) in Rom 1:24, 26, and 28 suggests that 1:24–32 is a unit. He also demonstrates (p. 90) the twofold structure of 1:24–27 and 28–32.

³⁷ Paul often uses *akatharsia* (2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:7) to refer to sexual sin.

³⁸ The wrath of God *is* being revealed every day if you know where to look for it.

³⁹ God punishes sin by letting people have what they want. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 111 notes that as the OT backdrop suggests (see Lev 26:25; Joshua 7:7; Judg. 2:14; 6:1, and many others in Judges), this “handing over” of people to their oppressors is not necessarily a final word. God brought Israel back many times from judgment when they repented and returned to Him. Likewise, now God can and does restore those who see the wrath of God for what it is, break the cycle, and turn to Him.

⁴⁰ Deffinbaugh, “The Present Wrath of God”: “God allows sin to increase, to the point where it becomes more visible. When sin is seen for what it is, men may, in the providence and grace of God, desire to be delivered from it. It is those who have drunk most deeply from the cup of sin who may be ready to give it up, who are sickened by it and who want to be forgiven and delivered. The prodigal son was allowed by his father to plunge deeply into sin, and it was in the pig pen that this son ‘came to himself,’ repented, and returned to his father. God’s present wrath is really a gracious gesture on God’s part. It is not permanent. Giving men over to sin is God’s way of encouraging men to forsake their sin and to be saved.”

⁴¹ Pao, *Thanksgiving*, 97, states: “This verse that alludes to Isaiah 44:19-20 is important for a number of reasons. First, it defines idolatry not by the precise objects being worshiped but by the one who demands sole glory. Any act of allegiance that attracts one’s attention from God and his glory is idolatry. Second, it defines idolatry as deception (cf. v. 18). Objects that claim to offer hope and security to those who worship them constitute ultimate deception. Third, this verse touches on the central claim of Old Testament covenantal traditions. God is recognized as the creator of all, and the covenantal relationship is built on this acknowledgment. Idolatry therefore can be understood as the fundamental act of betrayal.”

⁴² Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 47 and Harrison and Hagner believe that the definite article should be translated and emphasized. Everett F. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner, “Romans” in the *Revised Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 49. Not all English versions and commentators agree.

⁴³ Schreiner, *Romans*, 93: “Why does Paul focus on homosexual relations, especially since it receives little attention elsewhere in his writings (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10)? Probably because it functions as the best illustration of that which is unnatural in the sexual sphere. Idolatry is ‘unnatural’ in the sense that it is contrary to God’s intention for human beings. To worship corruptible animals and human beings instead of the incorruptible God is to turn the created order upside down. In the sexual sphere the mirror image of this ‘unnatural’ choice of idolatry is homosexuality (cf. Schlatter 1995: 43; Hays 1986: 191). Human beings were intended to have sexual relations with those of the opposite sex. Just as idolatry is a violation and perversion of what God intended, so too homosexual relations are contrary to what God planned when he created man and woman.”

⁴⁴ One cannot help but think of the men of Sodom and Gomorrah who burned with passion to have sex with Lot’s two guests (Gen 19:1–11). The verb used in the LXX means “to have sex with,” but the fact that they passed up Lot’s two daughters and instead demanded to have sex with the two angelic men reminds one of the very thing Paul is saying here. See Greg Herrick, “Study and Exposition of Romans 1:18–32”: www.bible.org/seriespage/study-and-exposition-romans-118-32.

⁴⁵ The word “degrading” (*atimia*) is also translated “dishonorable (NET, ESV), shameful (NIV, NLT), and “vile” (NKJV). See also BDAG s.v. *atimia*: “shameful passions.”

⁴⁶ Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 48 writes, “Whether or not a homosexual gene exists is irrelevant, because homosexuality in the Scripture refers always to an action, not a feeling. Hence Scripture condemns the action and not the feeling. As a result, the Bible forbids homosexual acts (cf. Gen 19:4–25; Lev 18:22; 20:13).”

⁴⁷ Moo writes, “The Bible repeatedly denounces the practice of homosexual relationships (e.g., Gen 19:1–28; Lev 18:22; 20:13; Deut 23:17–18). Many Greeks, however, not only tolerated homosexuality, but considered consensual sex between men to be a higher form of love than heterosexual relations.” Douglas J. Moo, “Romans,” *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 14.

⁴⁸ There are Christians who attempt to argue that the Bible permits homosexuality. See <http://www.soulforce.org/pdf/whatthebiblesays.pdf>

⁴⁹ The word translated “due penalty” (*antimisthia*) is related to the word translated “dishonored” (*atimazo*) in 1:24 and to the word translated “degrading” (*atimia*) in 1:26.

⁵⁰ Stott, *Romans*, 77; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 116 n. 133.

⁵¹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 116 notes that the sexual perversion itself may be the punishment. Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, 111 aptly states: “When man attempts to escape from God into freedom, the result really is that he falls prey to the forces of corruption.”

⁵² Boa and Kruidenier observe: “It is frightful to consider what happened to the Roman Empire after reaching a point of immorality, which championed homosexuality (not tolerated, but championed), and then to look at modern cultures which have devolved to a similar place morally.” Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, *Romans*. Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2000), 55.

⁵³ There is a wordplay in the Greek: people “did not see fit [*edokimasan*] to acknowledge God any longer so God gave them over to a depraved [*adokimon*] mind.”

⁵⁴ See Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2007).

⁵⁵ See Lev 11:44; 1 Pet 1:15–16.