

THE CONSEQUENCES OF REBELLION
Romans 1:24-32

Translation

²⁴Therefore, God gave them over in the cravings of their hearts to immorality, such that their bodies would be continually dishonored among them. ²⁵For indeed they exchanged the truth of God with the lie and began to worship and serve creation rather than the one who created, who is praised into the ages, amen.

²⁶Because of this, God gave them over to dishonorable passions. For as their women began to exchange the natural function for the one against nature, ²⁷so likewise the men also began to abandon the natural function of the women and began to be inflamed with their desire towards one another. As a result, men do the shameless deed with men and receive in themselves the recompense that was necessary for their error.

²⁸And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to a worthless mind, to do what is not fitting. ²⁹For they are filled with every kind of unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice. They are gossipers, ³⁰slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, boasters, contrivers of evil, disobedient to parents. ³¹They are senseless, faithless, heartless, merciless. ³²For indeed, although they knew the regulation of God that the ones who do such things are worthy of death, they not only do them continually, but also are approving of those who do them.

Central Idea

The consequences of mankind rejecting God are the corruption of man's worship, love, and way of thinking.

Exegetical Outline

- I. God's response to man's rejection was a relinquishment of control whereby man opted to participate in corrupted worship. (24-25)
 - A. God's response to man's rejection was His relinquishing of control which resulted in mankind dishonoring their bodies. (24)
 - B. Mankind's actions when God relinquished control were the embrace the ultimate falsehood followed by the initiation of corrupt worship, worship of the creation instead of the creator. (25)
- II. The consequence of man's corrupt worship was that God gave them over to corrupt love. (26-27)
 - A. The consequence of man's misplaced worship was that God gave them over to dishonorable passions. (26a)
 - B. The first example of mankind being given over to dishonorable passions was women exchanging their natural relations for relations against nature. (26b)
 - C. The second example of mankind being given over to dishonorable passions was men leaving their natural relations with women for sexual relations with men, for which they experienced consequences. (27)

- III. Another consequence of man's rejection of God was God handing man over to the leadership of corrupt thinking. (28-31)
- A. The cause of God handing man over to disqualified minds was their disqualification of God in their thinking. (28a)
 - B. A consequence of man rejecting God was that God handed man over to the authority of a disqualified mind. (28b)
 - C. What happens when men are under the leadership of disqualified minds is that men do that which should not be done. (28c)
 - D. The fruit of disqualified mental leadership is depravity in men's thoughts, emotions, behavior, and character. (29-31)
 - E. Further evidence of disqualified mental authority is not just the commission of the aforementioned sins, but the approval of such sins in spite of knowing their fatal consequences. (32)

Introduction

Now they have gone and done it. Now they are in serious trouble...

At first glance, Romans 1:21-23 seems like the scene in a movie where a protagonist provokes their antagonist to the breaking point. The fury and wrath of the antagonist is about to be unleashed in unprecedented measure. In cartoons, steam would pour forth from the antagonist's ears while his face turned flaming red.

By all rights, that is what should have happened next in Paul's retelling of God's activity in human history in Romans 1. But that is not how Romans 1:24-32 unfolds. Rather than an explosive, violent response, there is relinquishment. Rather than retaliation, there is simply a sense of "So be it."

Paul begins his letter to the believers in Rome defining himself and his calling in light of the Gospel (Rom 1:1-7). He expresses his heartfelt desire to join with the Christians there in order to further proclaim the Gospel (Rom 1:7-15). In verses 16-17, Paul culminates with the overarching theme for the next eight chapters, that is, the righteousness obtainable through faith for "the true method of man's acceptance with God" (Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 427). Then it heats up.

In verse 18, Paul begins to explain the present reality that the Romans were living in: the revelation of God's wrath. God is opposing sin and wickedness, particularly those who attempt to conceal God's efforts of revealing Himself to man (Rom 1:18). God has plainly made Himself known to all since the beginning of time, and therefore mankind cannot claim ignorance (Rom 1:19-20).

But instead of recognizing and honoring God as God, man swapped God for idols cast in the form of what He created (Rom 1:21-23). Man chose inanimate objects to have authority over them rather than the living One who had rightful authority. It was a mutiny, a rebellion of cosmic proportions.

So how does God respond? That is what verses 24-32 unfold.

Exegesis and Commentary of Romans 1:24-32

Relinquishing Control (24-25)

“Therefore God gave them over...”¹ In light of mankind’s rejection of God in verses 21-23, what does God do? He does not obliterate them. He does not play a guilt trip on them. No, He hands them over. The verb *to give over* is technical language used when custody of a person or object is transferred to an authority, such as the police or a court of law for prosecution (BDAG 762 s.v. 1b). Hence the transfers, the *giving-over*’s, in verses 24, 26, and 28 are each a punitive measure. What will happen to man as a result of God taking this action is not going to be fun or pleasant. It is the consequence for their rebellion.

At the same time, this particular verb is used when that which is being transferred is of valuable to the person surrendering it (BDAG 761 s.v. 1). God is not simply turning His back on mankind. He cares greatly for man, but since man has rejected His authority, He is placing man under a new authority. God is relinquishing his rightful place.

The realm over which God vacated His post was “in the desires of their hearts to immorality.”² To Paul’s audience, the heart was “the center and source of the whole inner life ... with its

¹ All translations are my translations unless otherwise noted.

² Ἐπιθυμία is translated by ESV, NASB95, NIV84, RSV, KJV as a negative term, e.g. *lusts* or *sinful desires*. BDAG defines this usage as “a desire for something forbidden or simply inordinate” (BDAG 372 s.v. 2). Paul repeatedly associates this term with vices (Gal 5:16; Col 3:5; 1 Tim 6:9; 2 Tim 3:6, and Titus 3:3). However, the term is not exclusively negative. In the 2nd c. AD, there is evidence of a broader use of ἐπιθυμία as a more general desire (MM 239). In fact, BDAG lists “a great desire for something” with either neutral or positive tones as an alternative translation (372 s.v. 1a,b; cf. LN 25.12). Paul uses the term in this positive sense as well (Phil 1:23, 1 Thess 2:17). To resolve the meaning of ἐπιθυμία, then we must look to the context to see which sense better fits.

KJV assumes that the clause ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῶν καρδιῶν αὐτῶν is used instrumentally. “Through the lusts of their own hearts,” the vileness takes over authority—a negative instrument for a negative outcome.

thinking, feeling and volition” (BDAG 508 s.v. 1b). God had been shaping their desires, channeling their passions towards good things, towards righteousness. But man rejected Him, so God allowed a new sheriff to come into town, to govern and direct the longings of their hearts.

The new sheriff was *immorality, vileness* (BDAG 34 s.v. 2). Obviously there is not some other god named Immorality to whom God is surrendering. Paul regularly personifies abstract concepts, and here he attributes to immorality a position of authority. This term speaks to “moral impurity which excludes man from fellowship with God,” especially in the arena of sexuality (Hauck, *TDNT*, 3:428-9). Wherever this new boss would take man’s passions, it was not going to be good.

Dishonoring Their Bodies (24)

New management has its consequences. God gave man over “such that³ their bodies would be continually⁴ dishonored⁵ among them.”⁶ Human bodies would be deprived of honor or respect—“an

Moulton felt that this clause was causal, that God handed them over because of the lusts of their heart (*A Grammar of the New Testament Greek*, 3:262). However, the διό at the beginning of verse 24 has already established causality for God’s action: man’s rejection of God. The other translations listed above treat the clause as communicating the sphere or realm—“in the lusts...” (cf. Dunn, 1:62; Morris, 88; Moo, 95; Schreiner, 92). If ἐν is being used to express a space or sphere—and I think it is—then the space must be one where God held sway prior to surrendering it to a new master. Could God have been in authority over sinful desires? Yes. But the pattern of verses 24, 26, and 28 is to emphasize the shift from God to a new authority and the fruit thereof. Moreover, I think passions and cravings can be good or evil. It just depends on who or what is fueling them. Therefore, I consider ἐπιθυμίας “of their hearts” to be neutral and translate the term simply as *desires* (cf. NET; *contra* Dunn, 1:62; Morris, 88).

³ Burton cites this verse as an instance where, when τοῦ and an infinitive follow a noun, the infinitive limits the noun (*Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, 158; cf. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* [GGNT], 1086-7; Jewett, 168-9). In this case, τοῦ ἀτιμάζεσθαι would modify ἀκαθαρσίαν. On the other hand, Wallace contends that this is a specific instance where the infinitival clause communicates the result (or perhaps purpose) of the main verb (*ExSyn*, 592-4; cf. BDAG 688 s.v. 2dβλ)—τοῦ ἀτιμάζεσθαι modifying παρέδωκεν. NET says that this infinitive could be purpose, result, or exegetical (*NET Bible Notes*, Rom 1:24). Dunn advocates for purpose (1:62), while Morris and Cranfield prefer result (88-9, 1:122). Moo is uncertain but leans towards exegetical (111-2). I agree with Wallace, BDAG, Morris, and Cranfield, seeing this infinitive as a result. I see Paul focusing on a series of consequences men face, first from rejecting God, then from God’s response to their rejection.

⁴ Ἀτιμάζεσθαι is an iterative present infinitive (Wallace, *ExSyn*, 521).

⁵ Ἀτιμάζεσθαι is either middle or passive in its construction. Cranfield asserts that despite the frequent translation of this term by commentators as middle voice, no other usage of it in the middle voice can be found in ancient sources (1:122). Therefore passive is preferred here.

especially grievous offense in the strongly honor-shame oriented Semitic and Greco-Roman societies” (BDAG 148-9). Moreover, it would not be a private or purely individual but rather something seen or known publicly, something that would impact their relationships and their community.

How was this denigration of bodies to happen? Paul does not say. Nonetheless, man’s worship of idols provoked God to hand them over in the first place (Rom 1:21-23). Common practices in idol worship included fertility rites and temple prostitution, both public practices. Participation in these public sexual rituals may be the dishonoring of which Paul speaks (Morris, 89). Or it could be some other form of defilement. Still, the sexual overtones of this verse point towards non-God-approved sexual activity bringing about the dishonor.

Corrupt Worship (25)

To explain⁷ what happens when mankind is under the new management or immorality, Paul says, “For indeed⁸ they exchanged the truth of God⁹ for¹⁰ the¹¹ lie.” The truth of God is not some set of

⁶ Cranfield notes four common translations for ἐν αὐτοῖς: 1) “among them,” 2) “among themselves,” 3) “through them,” and 4) “in their own persons”—with preference for the first (1:122-3; cf. Jewett, 169; NASB95). Dunn, Moo, and Schreiner prefer the second (1:52; 95; 92; cf. NET, ESV, RSV). NIV84 prefers “with one another,” akin to option 3 (cf. GNB). “Among them” is preferred as it is not individualistic or privatistic while insinuating the sexual misconduct described in verses 26-27 (Jewett, 168-9).

⁷ Relative clauses are used to express the basis for the preceding statement, the reason for it, or they can further explain the statement, which is the case in verse 25 (Robertson, *GGNT*, 959).

⁸ Ὅστις is used “to emphasize a characteristic quality, by which a preceding statement is to be confirmed” (BDAG, 729 s.v. 2b).

⁹ Understanding τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ θεοῦ is complicated. Τοῦ θεοῦ could be an attributed genitive, making the phrase “the true God” or “the truthfulness of God” (cf. NEB). Τοῦ θεοῦ could be an appositional genitive—“the truth, namely God.” Τοῦ θεοῦ could be an objective genitive—“the truth about God” (cf. ESV, RSV, GNB, BDAG 42 s.v. 2b). Or τοῦ θεοῦ could be a genitive of source/origin—“the truth from God.” Dunn entertains both the objective and the attributive genitive (1:63). Moo rejects the genitive of source as well as the possessive genitive—“God’s truth”—in favor of an appositional view—“the reality, the fact of God as he has revealed himself” (112; cf. Jewett, 170; Mounce, 81; Moule, 50; Morris, 90). Because the accusation against man in verse 23 is their rejection of God as God and their replacement of Him with other idols, to view the truth as a mere collection of facts about God seems too small. Their exchange was a wholesale replacement of God Himself, which would render the phrase appositional. However, “the truth of God” was preferred for ease of translation.

¹⁰ Μεταλλάσσω τὶ ἐν τινι is an idiom meaning to “exchange something for something else” (BDAG 329 s.v. 5b).

facts about God. Nor is it a set of truths possessed by God about nature, life, etc. *Truth*, in this instance, is the supreme truth in Christianity: God’s revelation of Himself as God (BDAG 42 s.v. 2b).

The lie mankind chose instead is the hallmark of the evil age and its ruler (Giesen, *EDNT*, 3:498). There is but one God, yet mankind rejected Him and chose idols as their gods (Rom 1:23). This lie, this horrific lie, then is *the* lie, the lie of lies (Morris, 90). It is the lie of idolatry, that there is any other god apart from God Himself.¹²

Having chosen for themselves the lie of idolatry, mankind “began¹³ to worship¹⁴ and serve¹⁵ creation rather than¹⁶ the one who created...” *To worship* is not just to express reverence and adoration, but also to actively, passionately participate in rituals before their replacement deity.¹⁷ “To worship and

¹¹ NET, ESV, NASB95, NIV84, RSV, KJV, and GNB all translate τῷ ψεύδει as “a lie.” In sharp contrast, Wallace writes, “A noun *cannot* be *indefinite* when it has the article...and it *must* be definite with the article” (*ExSyn*, 243, *emphasis his*). Hence, I believe Paul is emphatically referring to a unique, supreme falsehood that mankind has bought into, one with direct correlation in magnitude to the singular, specific “truth of God,” and therefore “the lie” is preferred (cf. Morris, 90; Jewett, 170).

¹² Jewett looks further back in redemptive history and cites man’s desire to define good and evil as *the* lie (170). While that is certainly man’s first rebellion against God, their first rejection of His sovereignty and Godhood, verses 21-23 and 25b point more definitively towards the general sin of idolatry rather a specific event.

¹³ I believe that ἐσεβάσθησαν and ἐλάτρευσαν are ingressive aorist verbs that mark the commencement of actions which were not occurring prior. Paul’s style in these verses appears to have a flow: something happened, and then something else happened as a result, and then something else happened as a result of that. Ingressive aorist verbs help keep that flow moving forward. Moreover, these acts have not ceased today which rules out any sense of completed action.

¹⁴ Σεβάζομαι is a deponent verb with an active meaning (cf. Mounce, *BBG*, 152).

¹⁵ In the 5th and 6th centuries BC, λατρεύω often meant to “work for hire or pay” or “to be subject or enslaved to” (LSJ 1032 s.v. 1, 2). But it was also used then as to “serve the gods with prayers and sacrifices” (LSJ 1032 s.v. 3). By the first century, it came to mean *to serve* (BDAG 586), more specifically “to perform religious rites as part of worship” (LN 1:532). Whatever the actions, they were “always offered to God (or to heathen gods)” (Strethmann, *TDNT*, 4:62; cf. MM 371).

¹⁶ Παρά is normally used to convey a comparison with an advantage over the object of the preposition; yet “when a comparison is made, one member of it may receive so little attention as to pass from consideration entirely, so that ‘more than’ becomes *instead of, rather than, to the exclusion of*” (BDAG 757-8 s.v. 3; cf. NET, ESV, NASB95, NIV84, RSV, GNB; *contra* KJV).

¹⁷ Σεβάζομαι is found only here in the NT. In its rare occurrences outside the NT—which are not all that close chronologically—the term is used as “to be afraid of” (LSJ 1587). It is “a stronger form of σέβομαι” (MM 570). Moreover, it conveys not simply “pious reverence” but actual cultic acts of worship (Foerster, *TDNT*, 7:173).

serve” evokes the full breath of activities involved in and full-bore engagement with ancient idol worship (Dunn, 1:63; Morris, 91; Moo, 113).

Then Paul underscores how messed up man’s worship is. The *one who created* is an unmistakable reference to God as its verbal element is used exclusively of God in the New Testament (LN 1:513). By worshiping creation, mankind not only chose the lesser over the greater, but in fact, they chose to bow down before that which they were created to rule (Gen 1:26, 28). Such is the folly of idolatry.

In revulsion to mankind’s folly, and perhaps for further emphasis, Paul delivers a climatic doxology,¹⁸ depicting the *one who created* as the one “who is praised into the ages, amen.” *Praised* carries the connotation of “being worthy of praise or commendation” (LN 1:429). The phrase *into the ages* means “to all eternity” (BDAG 32 s.v. 1b). In other words, there is one who will be worshipped for all time. There is one worthy of being served. And it is *not* an idol made by the hands of men in the form of a created thing. It is the one who made it all in the first place, God and God alone. *Amen*, and amen.

Corrupted Love (26-27)

Dishonorable Passions (26a)

“Because of this,” because of mankind’s rebellion and corrupted worship, “God gave them over to dishonorable¹⁹ passions.” Again, God is handing mankind over to another judge. Last time, it was to immorality; this time, strong physical, sexual desires (LN 1:291; cf. BDAG 748 s.v. 2). These are not just any passions, though. These are degrading, ignoble passions (Aalen, *NIDNTT*, 2:50). In the first century, dishonor “put a person outside the community. [It] was the technical term for the deprivation of a citizen’s rights” (idem, 2:49).

¹⁸ Dunn sees this doxology as a means for Paul to separate himself from this corrupted worship (1:63; Morris, 91). In contrast, Moo believes it the punch line of idolatry’s foolishness (113). Concluding with *amen*, Paul seems to express personal worship (Cranfield, 1:125), but I see no reason why it could not accomplish both.

¹⁹ Ἀτιμίας is an attributive genitive (Robertson, *GGNT*, 496; cf. NET, ESV, NASB95, NIV84, RSV, KJV, GNB).

Women (26b)

What happens under the authority of these dishonorable passions? Paul proceeds to explain, “For as²⁰ their women²¹ began to exchange²² the natural function for²³ the one against nature...” Mankind exchanged the truth of God. Now, Paul uses the same verb to explain what women began to do under new management. *Natural* means in alignment with “the basic order of things in nature” (BDAG 1069). In the New Testament, *function* expresses sexual intimacy, sexual relations (MM 692; cf. BDAG 1089 s.v. 3; LN 1:257). Basically Paul is telling his readers that women chose²⁴ to deviate from their self-evident sexual design, preferring instead an intimacy that did not accord with their design. In lesbianism, their love had become corrupted.

Men (27)

“So²⁵ likewise, the men²⁶ also began to abandon²⁷ the natural function of the women...” The men were in the same vein of evil as the women. They were “giving up” on their compatibility with the

²⁰ BDAG asserts that γὰρ here is a “marker of cause or reason” when used with another conjunction, τε in this case (189 s.v. 1b). However, διὰ τοῦτο has already defined the cause or reason for God giving them over. Dunn, Moo, Schreiner, and Cranfield leave the τε untranslated and treat γὰρ as explanatory (1:64; 95; 92; 1:125; cf. NET, ESV, NASB95). Morris renders the term as an ascensive conjunction (“even”) (75; cf. NIV84, GNB). I think τε connects nonsequential statements in verses 26b and 27 (cf. BDAG 993 s.v. 2b). I see no reason for an ascensive translation; therefore an explanatory translation is preferred.

²¹ While θῆλυς normal means *female*, the presence of the article changes the translation to *woman* (BDAG 455; cf. LN 1:703). Nevertheless Paul’s emphasis appears to be on the femaleness of the women, their sexuality distinguishing them from men (Dunn, 1:64; Morris, 92, Moo, 114)

²² I translated μετήλλαξαν as an ingressive aorist so as to better communicate what changed, what was new, with mankind’s dishonorable desires now in authority over them. Furthermore, this exchange is still happening today, so any translation that terminates the action should be avoided.

²³ Μεταλλάσσω τί εἰς τί is an idiom meaning to “exchange something for something else” (BDAG 639).

²⁴ Μετήλλαξαν is not in the passive voice. If it were, one could posit that this exchange was being forced upon the women. But μετήλλαξαν is active. Therefore, the women themselves had a hand in this exchange.

²⁵ This τε is complementary to the τε in verse 26, thereby completing the “as... so...” connection between the two sentences. See note 21.

female body (BDAG 156 s.v. 3b). Paul is invoking the language of creation in Genesis 1:27 as well as the language of the prohibitions against homosexuality in the Septuagint (Moo, 114-6).

Concurrent with their abandonment of sex with women, the men “began to²⁸ be inflamed with²⁹ their desire towards one another.” They “were consumed” (*EDNT*, 1:410). They burned with sexual longing (BDAG 303 s.v. 2). Their desire was not simply superficial, but it was personal³⁰ and powerful (BDAG 722).

“As a result,³¹ men³² do the shameless deed with men.”³³ Under the authority of dishonorable passions, men gratify the longings of their loins with one another—corrupt love, the male expression. In this case, *do* is not simply *do*. The verb focuses attention on what is achieved by the action (*EDNT*, 2:271;

²⁶ While BDAG may translate οἱ ἄρσενες literally *the males*, with a heightened attention on the gender (135), many versions translate the phrase *the men* (NET, ESV, NASB95, NIV84, RSV, KJV, GNB). Such a gloss reads easier, but Paul emphasis on male sexual distinctiveness and subsequent compatibility with the female body must not be lost in the commentary.

²⁷ Ἀφέντες is an aorist participle of attendant circumstance, and because it modifies the ingressive aorist verb ἐξεκαύθησαν, I translated it as “began to abandon.”

²⁸ I translated ἐξεκαύθησαν as an ingressive aorist passive verb in parallel with μετήλλαξαν in verse 26. For my reasoning, see note 23.

²⁹ Two different approaches are used to translate ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει αὐτῶν. NET, NASB95, and KJV render ἐν spatially or spherically: “in their desire” (cf. Moo, 95; Schreiner, 92; Moule, 52). Meanwhile ESV, NIV84, RSV, and GNB render ἐν as the manner in which the men were inflamed and subsequently drop αὐτῶν: “with desire” (cf. Dunn, 1:64; Morris, 74; Jewett, 178; BDAG 722). Ἐκκαίομαι ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει (literally, “to burn with intense desire”) is an idiom with such intensity that “in some languages the equivalent idiom is ‘to boil with desire,’ ‘to feel hot in the genitals,’ or ‘to prefer to die rather than to do’” (LN 1:290). Ὀρεξίς is used only once and negatively in the NT, but in extra-biblical sources, the term is neutral apart from the virtue or vice of its object (MM 456). “Only when man perverts the truth of God ... is ὀρεξίς corrupted in punishment” (Heidland, *TDNT*, 5:448). While either translation seems viable, I prefer ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει αὐτῶν to answer the question, “In what manner were the men drawn towards one another?” and therefore I chose “with their intense desire.”

³⁰ I take αὐτῶν as a possessive genitive and therefore an indicator of personal attachment to the desire.

³¹ Κατεργαζόμενοι is a participle of result (Deppe, *The Lexham Clausal Outlines of the Greek New Testament* [LCOGNT], Rom 1:27).

³² For why *men* and not *males*, see note 27.

³³ While this is a dependent clause modifying ἐξεκαύθησαν in the preceding independent clause, I have gone ahead and begun a new sentence for the ease of reading it in English (cf. NET, NIV84, GNB).

cf. Moo, 116). Paul is not just saying that men have sex with men, but that men advanced or even promoted the shameless deed. It is an ongoing³⁴ act, one of defiance, a snubbing “of social and moral standards, with resulting disgrace, embarrassment, and shame” (LN 1:758).

And they “receive³⁵ in themselves the recompense that was necessary for their error.” “The wages of sin”—that is what *receive* connotes. It is an earned or reciprocal ‘receiving’ (BDAG 115 s.v. 1; cf. LN 1:490). *Recompense* picks up the same idea—“requital base upon what one deserves” (BDAG 90). So there is penalty these men experience in themselves, an inevitable one (LN 1:671). Its inevitability stems from the their error, their “wandering from the path of truth ... resulting in moral degradation” (BDAG 822). The penalty for homoerotic love is homoerotic love. (Cranfield, 1:126-7; Dunn, 1:64; Morris, 93; Schreiner, 97). Chrysostom remarked,

See how [Paul] goes again to the fountain head of the evil, namely, the impiety that comes of their doctrines, and this he says is a reward of that lawlessness. For since in speaking of hell and punishment, it seemed he would not at present be credible to the ungodly and deliberate choosers of such a life, but even scorned, he shows that the punishment was in this pleasure itself. (*NPNF*, 11:357)

Before leaving the topic of homosexuality, it is important to clarify the passage does not refute the possibility of genetic predisposition biasing an individual towards choosing homoeroticism. But these verbal elements (*exchange* in 26 as well as *abandon*, *be inflamed*, and *do* in 27) are active in the force of their usage, which means that men and woman have a direct hand in doing them. They carry responsibility for choosing to pursue and fulfill homosexual desires. Any predisposition does not absolve them of this accountability. Akin to alcoholism, genes are not an excuse to indulge brokenness, but it does mean that the person with those genes will have to depend all the more on God to walk in righteousness.

³⁴ Κατεργαζόμενοι is a present participle. “The present participle describes a continuous action” (Mounce, *BBG*, 240).

³⁵ Ἀπολαμβάνω is a participle of result (Deppe, *LCOGNT*, Rom 1:27).

The Authority of Corrupt Thinking (28-31)

The Disqualification of God (28a)

“And just as³⁶ they did not see fit³⁷ to acknowledge³⁸ God...” *To acknowledge* means “to recognize something as being what it truly is” (LN 1:368). Repeating his accusation from verses 21-23, Paul asserts that mankind opted not to affirm God as God. They did not consider God “as genuine or worthy,” as though He had somehow failed man (LN 1:363). Weighed, measured, and found wanting, mankind disqualified God as God (Dunn, 1:66).

The Authority of a Disqualified Mind (28b)

“God gave them over to a worthless mind...” After man’s disqualification of Him, God sovereignly entrusts man to a new authority. Adding to immorality and dishonorable passions, this time the correctional officer is a new “way of thinking” (BDAG 680 s.v. 2a). This way of thinking would be one that “has not stood the test, ... has been shown to be a sham, and has therefore been rejected” (Haarbeck, *NIDNTT*, 3:808). Mankind disqualified God, and God gave man over to a disqualified set of values, ethics, and morals (Behm, *TDNT*, 4:958).

³⁶ Robertson suggests that καθώς is causal in nature for verse 28 (*GGNT*, 967; cf Deppe, *LCOGNT*, Rom 1:28; BDAG 493 s.v. 3; Cranfield. 1:127; ESV, NIV84, RSV, GNB). However, there are no grounds to mandate translating it as causal. Rather there is wordplay with δοκιμάζω and ἀδόκιμος. As such, καθώς is translated here in a comparative sense to better convey the poetic justice evoked by the wordplay (cf. Dunn, 1:66; Morris, 93; Schreiner, 92).

³⁷ BDAG translates δοκιμάζω here as *see fit* rather than *approve* or *prove* (255 s.v. 2b; NET, ESV, NASB95, RSV).

³⁸ Literally meaning “to have in recognition,” ἔχω ἐν ἐπιγνώσει is idiomatic, meaning to acknowledge (LN 1:368; cf. BDAG 422 s.v. 9a; NET, ESV, NASB95, RSV).

No-No's (28c)

The corrupted mind then leads man “to do what is not fitting³⁹.” Bad judgment, degraded values—they continually⁴⁰ result⁴¹ in actions that *are improper* (BDAG 491). Improper by whose standards? Well, Paul does not specify. Despite their corruption, vestiges of God’s moral standards in the conscience of man—hence why the unregenerate still experience guilt. So the standard could be what even the community of fallen man deems wrong, sinful, errant (cf. Dunn 1:66), but ultimately the only reliable standard would be God’s (*EDNT*, 2:222).

In contrast to his preceding diatribe against homosexuality, Paul does not have just one particular sin in mind now.⁴² The scope of this brokenness is much broader and more universal, and with it comes significant ramifications. “This tragic incapacity [i.e. the worthless way of thinking] is the explanation for the apparently inexplicable failure of people to comprehend, let alone practice, biblical ethical principles” (Moo, 118).

The Fruit of a Disqualified Mind (29-31)

What causes⁴³ man to continually do improper things? Paul says, “For they are filled⁴⁴ with every kind of unrighteousness, wickedness, greediness, malice.”⁴⁵ Having ejected God from His rightful

³⁹ There is an understandable temptation to read τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα as technical language from Stoicism (Jewett, 183), but Schlier convincingly asserts that the technical form of the negated καθήκον is τὸ παρὰ τὸ καθήκον (*TDNT*, 3:439-40). Therefore, this usage of καθήκω is informal (cf. MM 312).

⁴⁰ ποιεῖν is a present infinitive conveying an iterative, continuous (cf. Mounce, *BBG*, 301).

⁴¹ Schreiner and Moo add the conjunction “so that” to their translations of this infinitival clause to communicate the result of mankind being handed over (92, 118; 95). While I concur with Morris that doing improper things is the natural result of the leadership of a disqualified mind (94), I felt that “so that” aired a scent of purpose or intent, an aroma I wanted to avoid. Subsequently, I chose not to include a connective phrase and trust my commentary to explain the clausal relationship (cf. NET, ESV, NASB95, NIV84).

⁴² The substantival participle καθήκοντα is plural, and therefore would literally be translated “the things that are (not) fitting.” For readability, however, the singular *what* is used in a collective sense to include all the *things* (cf. NET, ESV, NIV84).

⁴³ Syntactically πεπληρωμένους is a masculine accusative plural participle. Cranfield and Jewett propose that it functions appositionally to αὐτοῦς in 28 (1:129; 183), but that would suggest that God handed over just a subset of mankind—those full of one particular sin or another. Yet Paul’s indictment is universal of all men.

place of authority, man's thinking degrades in His absence. It is as if when God left, and so too did a measure of his goodness and righteousness, thereby creating a vacuum begging to be filled.

And filled it was, but by all the wrong things. Paul's list of vices beginning here and continuing into verses 30 and 31 draws attention to the diverse forms of corruption in the mind of man (BDAG 828 s.v. 5), not the totality of any one corruption (*contra* NASB95). Paul starts with "unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, depravity." These four terms are deliberately broad, and definite distinction from one to another, or to others in this vice list, is unnecessary (Schreiner, 98).

Unrighteousness is antithetical to righteousness of God that Paul so espouses (Jewett, 184). It carries the

Nevertheless, *πεπληρωμένους* is "grammatically dependent upon αὐτοῦς" (Moo, 118). Because *πεπληρωμένους* is a perfect participle, it expresses a completed action or, as Moo says, "an existing state" (*idem*). Hence, I believe *πεπληρωμένους*, and the terms that follow it, depict both the natural result of God handing them over and the cause for man's ongoing commission of improper acts. For ease of understanding, though, I simply began a new sentence (cf. NET, ESV, NIV84, RSV, GNB).

⁴⁴ *Πεπληρωμένους* is a perfect participle and therefore a completed action (cf. Mounce, *BBG*, 276). Consequently NASB95's and KJV's "being filled" is ruled out. Moreover, the action of a perfect verb has an ongoing effect (*idem*). So a preferred translation is one that communicates not just a past action—"were filled" in ESV and RSV as well as Dunn's "filled" (1:67)—but also its residual impact. Thus "are filled" is used here (cf. Schreiner, 92; NET, GNB).

⁴⁵ This verse presents three text-critical problems: 1) the inclusion of *πονηρία*, 2) the inclusion of *πορνεία*, and 3) the order of the resulting collection of dative nouns after *ἀδικία*. The variant including *πονηρία* is strongly affiliated with the Alexandrian text-type with **Ⲙ**, B, and 1739 as well as all the secondary Alexandrian manuscripts as witnesses. Therefore this reading can be dated to the 2nd c. AD. This variant is also moderately affiliated with the Byzantine text-type. Witnesses excluding *πονηρία* are few and date only to the 9th c. AD. The external evidence is overwhelming; therefore *πονηρία* is included.

The inclusion of *πορνεία* is not strongly affiliated with any text-types. Its earliest witness is 7th c. AD. In contrast, readings that exclude it are strongly affiliated with the Alexandrian text-type (**Ⲙ**, A, B, C, 33, 81, 1506, 1739, and 1881), dating the exclusion to the 2nd c. AD. In addition the external evidence, the witnesses that include both *πονηρία* and *πορνεία* could easily be editorial inclusions to match 2 Cor 12:21, Gal 5:19, Eph 5:3, and Col 3:5. Witnesses that only include *πορνεία* could be explained as simply confusion with *πονηρία*, two words with similar vowels and consonants. Hence *πορνεία* is excluded.

If the readings of *πορνεία* without *πονηρία* are converted to readings of *πονηρία* and the reading with both *πορνεία* and *πονηρία* are reduced to just *πονηρία*, then the order breaks down as follows: *πονηρία* in the first position is strongly Alexandrian and moderately Byzantine. The Western text-type strongly favors starting with *κακία*. Listing *πονηρία* first is then preferred, though only with a slight advantage over *κακία*. Then readings with *πλεονεξία* following *πονηρία* are strongly attested to in the Western text-type and moderately so in the Alexandrian, possibly dating the sequence to early 2nd c. AD. By default then, *κακία* is third in the list.

idea of *injustice* or *wrongdoing* (BDAG 20). *Wickedness* means “a lack of moral or social values” (BDAG 851). “It denotes moral worthlessness” (Harder, *TDNT*, 6:565). *Greed* is an insatiable appetite for more (BDAG 824). Lastly, *depravity* is a “lacking of whatever is good” (Jewett, 185).

Then Paul says, “They are⁴⁶ full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice.” These thought patterns are relatively straightforward. There does not appear to be any logical sequence to them apart from how several are pronounced in Greek (Schreiner, 98; *contra* Cranfield, 130). They certainly evidence the leadership other than God’s in the mind of man.

Paul continues, “They are gossipers, slanderers, God-haters⁴⁷, insolent, arrogant, boasters, contrivers of evil, disobedient to parents.” The first two types of people attack others’ reputations (Schreiner, 98). Literally “a whisperer,” the first is someone who makes “secret attacks on a person’s character, as compared with [a slanderer], an open detractor” (MM 698). Insolence, arrogance, and boasting are all faces of pride (Morris, 97), portraying “the acts,” “the thoughts,” and “the words” of the prideful (Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, 105). Under his disqualified mind, man “forms strategies [and] tactics to effect” evil (BDAG 418). He rejects the God-given authority of his parents, and in doing so, turns his back on a source of blessing (cf. Deut 5:16).

Wrapping up his list of man’s corrupted ways of thinking and acting, Paul says, “They are senseless, faithless, heartless,⁴⁸ merciless.”⁴⁹ The *senseless* man is foolish, for he shows a deficit of

⁴⁶ Μεστοῦς provides a natural break in Paul’s vice list for a new sentence (cf. NET). This new clause assumes a supplied verb with the same verbal force as the preceding verb, πεπληρωμένους (Morris, 96).

⁴⁷ Θεοστυγής is a term is translated either passively (“hated of God”) or actively (“haters of God”). In the 5th c. BC, the term was used passively as “hated by the gods” and “hated of god” (LSJ 792), and it is even used by Athenagoras in the 2nd c. AD. But in and around 1st c. AD, there appear instances of the active meaning (BDAG 452). Bertram and Güting believe θεοστυγεῖς functions passively and subsequently attributively to ὑβριστάς (*TDNT*, 8:306; *NIDNTT*, 3:28; cf. GNB). A passive θεοστυγής functioning substantively would be out of place in the vice list because being hated by God is not something man does, but rather what God does (Morris, 97). While θεοστυγεῖς could modify ὑβριστάς, the other adjectives in this verse (κατάλαλος, ὑπερήφανος, and ἀπειθής) are all substantival. So it seems unnecessary to grant an exception and break Paul’s pattern when a legitimate alternative (the active understanding) is available. Hence “God-haters” is preferred (cf. Moo, 120; Schreiner, 98; Cranfield, 131).

⁴⁸ Some manuscripts include ἀσπονδους after ἀστόργους in this vice list. This reading is strongly Byzantine with the support of K, L, and Byz. However, the exclusion of ἀσπονδους is strongly Western (D, G, and

wisdom, acumen, and perceptivity (LN 1:385). The *faithless* man is treacherous, for he shows no commitment to his obligations and his word means nothing to him (BDAG 146; cf. Schreiner, 98). The *heartless* man is unloving, for he shows no tenderness even to his family and friends (BDAG 145). The *merciless* man is ruthless, for he refuses to show compassion and give grace (LN 1:750; cf. Morris, 99).

Approval (32)

As if the list of man's vices in 29-31 were not enough of a consequence for their disqualifying of God, Paul says, "For indeed,⁵⁰ although⁵¹ they knew the declaration of God..." Man was not just vaguely familiar with God's ethical demands (BDAG 249 s.v. 1), he knew them "exactly, completely, through and through" (BDAG 369 s.v. 1a). Paul had in view not the Mosaic Law but the imprint of morality made by God on the conscience of man, an edict accessible to all apart from special revelation (Moo, 121; Dunn, 1:69).

Specifically, the declaration was "that the ones who do such things are worthy of death." *Such things* are the improper things of verses 29-31 (BDAG 1009 s.v. $\alpha\alpha\alpha$). The persons who bear the fruit of this corrupted way of thinking are *deserving* of death (BDAG 94 s.v. 2b). Paul does not clarify whether he is writing of physical death or spiritual death, but rather "simply viewing it as a horror. It tyrannizes the human race and keeps people from the life that is life indeed, whether we think of this world or the next" (Morris, 100).

it) and strongly Alexandrian (8, A, B, 1506, and 1739). Thus the date of the exclusion is early 2nd c. AD. In the face of overwhelming external data, the exclusion is preferred.

⁴⁹ Again Paul is demonstrating rhetorical artistry in choosing these words. The assonance of each term beginning with "α-" creates an artful wordplay. Like Dunn, Schreiner, and NIV, I have attempted echo the assonance in choosing English terms that end with "-less" (1:68; 98-9). The Greek negation by the prefix "α-" could also be emphasized in the translation—"unwise, unfaithful, unloving, unmerciful."

⁵⁰ Ὅστις conveys a sense of confirmation for a prior statement (BDAG 729 s.v. 2b)—in this case, man now being under the authority of a disqualified mind.

⁵¹ Ἐπιγινόντες is an aorist participle of concession (Robertson, *GGNT*, 1129; Deppe, *LCOGNT*, Rom 1:32; Moo, 121).

“They not only do them continually, but also are approving of those who do them.”⁵² Despite of the shocking consequence of death, man still chooses to act viciously. Even worse, he *applauds* others who act in the same fashion (*EDNT*, 3:305). In other words, man’s thinking is so corrupted that he encourages his fellow man to go down roads that he knows lead to death, even cheering his brother along the way.

Conclusion & Application

Man rejected God. So God handed them over to new authorities for judgment. Under the management of immorality, dishonorable passions, and disqualified thinking, man would experience and wallow in corrupted worship, corrupted love, and corrupted thinking. Creation would be praised instead of the Creator. The same gender would be loved instead of the gender designed to compliment. Vice would be the rule of man’s mind instead of virtue. All because man rebelled and desired to dethrone the Almighty. *So be it.*

For today, two applications stand out. First, our obsession with behavior management will only get us so far. New laws, better politicians, wiser judges, more prisons—none will restore righteousness. None will permanently beat back the homosexual agenda, the sensual decadence, or the materialism of our day, for they are all symptoms of a greater problem. We must look upstream of today’s turmoil and see that we live in the midst of the consequences of man’s rebellion. So long as man rejects God, such problems as these, and the many more described in Roman 1:24-32, will plague mankind. Therefore, while we do need to treat symptoms, we must also point to the real cure: the reacknowledgment of God as God. That is our hope fulfilled in the eschaton, and that must be our prayer and pursuit in the lives of individuals today.

Second, we must hold to the truth about homosexuality. It is not just an alternative lifestyle, supposedly one among many equal choices. Homosexuality is against our inherent design. It is an

⁵² I translated ποιοῦσιν and συνευδοκοῦσιν as iterative present tense verbs to accentuate man’s unceasing persistence in acting against God’s decree.

abandonment of our natural functions. It is product of succumbing to dishonorable passions. It is also a punishment in and of itself. Homosexuality was prevalent in Roman and Greek cultures, and Paul had the courage to speak the truth. So should we.

That said, to homosexuals themselves, we must communicate that God loves them and died for them too. Their sin is listed right alongside greed, gossiping, boasting, and disobeying parents—all more socially acceptable in the religious circles. These so-called lesser sins are equally as vile and depraved as sexual sins, and more importantly, God's grace is sufficient for them all.