

# ROMANS BIBLE STUDY

## Romans 1:24-32

### Lesson #3

#### Introduction

This is lesson three of our Romans Bible Study. Last week we covered chapter 1, verses 18-23, which we titled “The Road to Perdition, part 1. In those verses the Apostle Paul defines the root cause, the initiating event, the very first step onto a path that eventually leads to inevitable destruction. There are definite signs along the way, and Paul is tracing for us, and all mankind, what those signs are, and how to recognize the error of one’s ways.

Paul says that the path to destruction starts with a stubborn denial of the obvious. An intentional suppression of known truth about God for the express intent of continuing to practice our desires for unrighteousness, meaning sin. Particularly lust, greed, violence, and deceptions for personal gain. This is the way fallen mankind thinks, it’s how we’re wired, as we say in modern vernacular. It is humanity’s innate tendencies since his first introduction to the knowledge of good and evil. The natural desires of mankind, since the sin of Adam and Eve, is only evil all the time, at least in the perspective of God. Listen to what He (God) said very early in the history of mankind, after the introduction of sin:

*5 Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7 The Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them." 8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.*

Gen 6:5-8 (NASB)

What we humans see as being just normal human thinking and behavior, God sees as only evil continually. What we seem to have here is a failure to communicate. However, not on God’s part but on mankind’s. God is perfect and righteous and holy, but we are flawed and sinful and unrighteous by nature. So our evaluation of what constitutes good and evil is from a perspective that is itself flawed and evil. Our diagnostic tools are malfunctioning, and our reasoning abilities are damaged. Therefore, when we evaluate the evidence, we don’t come to the same conclusions as God, because we don’t have His perfect and holy perspective. We think close is good enough. We think good and evil is simply a trade-off of one against the other, and we try to keep our good ahead of our evil, and if we feel like we’re doing that then we think we’re okay. This is the classic mindset of that myriad of hapless travelers merrily making their way along that deadly road to perdition. This is a sin damaged mind deriving a faulty conclusion that will result in disaster.

The first, and most prevalent among sins, is that of denying God. There is little or nothing more egregious to Him than this. Neither a person nor a society of people who deny God can possibly please God. The sin of denial, or the sin of idolatry, which are essentially the same, is the starting line of the road to perdition. Everyone on that road, without exception, started right there. The God who stretched forth the heavens, laid the foundation of the earth, and formed the conscious spirit of mankind within him, does not long tolerate disrespect and ingratitude. Especially when they are done with full knowledge and intent, for the sake of indulging unrighteous behaviors. When this practice of denial and idolatrous substitutions persists, God eventually reacts with predictable results.

Now I’d like to add two things here that weren’t in my original manuscript, but they need to be said. First there’s the argument that God is a myth because He’s invisible. If we can’t see Him then He doesn’t really exist. We’ve all heard this statement many times. Let me immediately stipulate that God is indeed invisible, He is not like us human beings, and we cannot see Him because He is a Spirit being, not a tangible corporal entity, He has no body, no tangible mass as we perceive things. And for this reason He has created an entire universe of things that are visible and tangible, all of which are a testimony of His existence. The argument that God isn’t real because we can’t see Him has no more merit than the argument that gravity isn’t real because we can’t see it. Both have obvious and inescapable effects that substantiate their existence. This argument is a childish ruse to mask the real issue of human responsibility to obey God.

Secondly, there’s the very common idea that freedom of religion is an honorable concept. That it demonstrates tolerance

and concern for others' beliefs and feelings. Which it does, but at what expense? The Old Testament books of Kings and Chronicles, are a historical account of the times and administrations in the history of the nation of Israel. There were kings who did good in the sight of God, and kings that did evil in the sight of God. The nation vacillated back and forth according to the inclinations of the present king. And the predominant criteria for declaring whether the king was righteous or evil was whether or not he allowed and supported the practice of idolatry among the peoples. The kings who were said to have done good in the sight of God were those who stopped the practices of idolatry among the people of the nation. Of course this wasn't popular with those who practiced those things, they were surely very unhappy with such intolerance for their idolatrous practices, and called the king an intolerant religious fanatic. Though not to his face I'm sure.

The point is, that we are often faced with decisions that will not make everybody happy. In fact, very few decisions we make will please everybody, so we have to make them based on what we believe to be right. But the question is, right in who's eyes? In the eyes of man, or the eyes of God, because quite often these are entirely different. In our own country, just as it was in the nation of Israel, the king had to decide what was most important for the good of the nation he was leading. It promoted peace and harmony among the various peoples of the land, to let them all practice whatever religion they wanted, and choose any god they liked; but, was that the right thing to do for the good of the nation?

And even more important, was it the right thing to do in the sight of God, who declared that He is the only true God, and Israel was to have no others besides Him? Who do we seek to please, men or God, that's the real question isn't it? When we disobey God to promote peace between men, are we doing long term harm for short term benefit? Is it possible that the short term benefit is far outweighed by the long term harm for denying and disobeying God? Both history, and the word of God say yes, idolatry has eventual consequences that are most horrific. When it's allowed, and promoted, and even taunted as loving and tolerant, certain things begin to happen.

The morality of the society begins to progressively degrade. With that decline of morality comes more violence. Ethics decline, lying and cheating become the common practice of people, and business, and eventually government. Compassion for others disappears, and is replaced with a "me first" attitude, which is accepted as perfectly normal and healthy. All of this results in a total loss of self respect, which is replaced with a new ethic of self gratification. This self gratification becomes the purpose of life, and dominates every action and every motivation. In this kind of society, adultery and sexual promiscuity thrives, and begins a plunge into depths of depravity that were previously considered unthinkable.

All of these are clear, even glaring signs posted by God along the road to perdition, but they are intentionally ignored, because a God hating society loves its sin, not its God. All of this happens because God loosens His internal and external restraints on human depravity, and allows them to sink to their own innate levels of sin and lust and greed. And it all begins at the starting line of denial and idolatry. Listen to what God told His beloved chosen children of Israel when they had fallen into this prolonged pattern of life, and false religions, which is idolatry, was running rampant throughout the nation:

*26 Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, 27 "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?" 28 Therefore thus says the Lord, "Behold, I am about to give this city (Jerusalem) into the hand of the Chaldeans and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will take it. 29 "The Chaldeans, who are fighting against this city will enter it and set this city on fire and burn it, with the houses where people have offered incense to Baal on their roofs and poured out drink offerings to other gods to provoke Me to anger. 30 "Indeed the sons of Israel and the sons of Judah have been doing only evil in My sight from their youth; for the sons of Israel have been only provoking Me to anger by the work of their hands," declares the Lord.*

Jer 32:26-30 (NASB)

What the nation of Israel was doing was hosting the authorized Temple of God on earth, and, at the same time, and in the same city, have people with alters to the false god Baal, and several others, and offering incense (meaning worship) to them at the same time. Now think about this for a minute. If the God we worship is true, and He is the only God, then how do we expect Him to react to such a practice? This is as great an insult as a human can possibly perpetrate against the God who created him, to worship some other fictitiously concocted deity right in front of Him. God told Jeremiah that the people of Israel had been doing this from their youth, and it had finally provoked Him to anger, which anger was to be expressed by His handing them over to a brutal dictator called Nebuchadnezzar, who would burn down their city, destroy

their Temple, kill most of them with the sword, and carry off the remaining remnant into slavery. All of which He actually did. And take note that these were His chosen people whom God had personally selected from among all of those on the face of the earth. (Dt 7:6; 14:2)

What we've just read was not just some spontaneous whim of God. He had sent prophets into Israel one after the other, warning them to repent of their idolatry and their sinful ways of life, but Israel didn't listen, because Israel didn't want to believe God. Acknowledging belief comes with some consequential damages to our self gratification, and we won't accept those damages, so we won't accept our God. We either deny Him, or we make a more suitable substitute. But this practice eventually provokes God to anger, and His wrath is both inevitable and severe. And this brings us to the verses of our present study, where God's wrath is about to be provoked, and Paul starts to show how it unfolds in a God denying society. We've already discussed the causes, now we start to see the results.

### THE ROAD TO PERDITION (Pt.2)

#### Verses 24-25:

*24 Therefore, God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among themselves. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*

Romans 1:24-25 (NASB)

Paul starts this verse with the word "therefore" showing that what results is for a just cause. God gives over a society to the innate lusts of their sinful hearts because they have intentionally, for a prolonged period of time, chosen to deny God and made for themselves alternatives. They deliberately *exchanged the truth of God for a lie*, that they knew to be a lie, but did it anyway so that they could continue to indulge their sinful passions, it's as simple as that. No great and profound mystery. Men deny God, and fabricate idols because they don't want to obey God's commandments. They concoct all kinds of high and profound scientific theories, and propound deep intellectual insights, but they are all nonsense; human fabrications of elaborate lies to try to substitute for what is blatantly obvious to even a child.

Paul says they have made an exchange. They have exchanged the truth of God for something else that's a lie. A truth for a lie, why would anybody make such an exchange? Isn't that kind of pointless? Of course it is, but when the truth is something you don't want to hear, and someone offers you a lie that is exactly what you do want to hear, you might be tempted to take the lie. Especially if its presented by someone with impressive credentials, and repeated over and over again without debate or opposition. And such is the lie that God is just a myth, and creation is simply the product of random chance, with no real meaning or eternal purpose. This is a foolish exchange, but it's a popular one, because it frees mankind of moral restraints and consequences, or so he hopes. This is exchanging the obvious truth of a creator God, for a senseless lie that accommodates our sensual pleasures. This is not an accident, nor just an unfortunate mistake made by a poor and uninformed humanity, it is an intentional exchange of known truth for a lie, and it's done for a sinister purpose. The purpose of indulging our unrighteous pleasures. (vv. 18,19)

So, what does God do in response to this unholy exchange? He *gives them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among themselves*. Since they made an exchange of His truth for a lie, He makes an exchange in their own bodies of that which is proper for that which is not, through their own lustful hearts. Mankind dishonors God by exchanging His truth for a lie, so God dishonors man by exchanging man's own desires from that which is honorable and proper, for that which is dishonorable and unnatural. And man dishonors himself by his very own doing. Rightly does man argue that he is innately constructed with these tendencies, that's exactly what God said He would do, to make a God denying humanity become depraved in its very own thinking and affections, and so He does.

When this sign is seen running rampant in a society, you know with certainty that it's the fulfillment of God's warning about denial and idolatry and unrestrained sin. It is a glaring sign post from God that a nation is on the road to perdition, and dangerously close to divine chastisement. It might be called a warning shot fired by God across the bow of a society that is headed for serious danger if it doesn't change its direction. The word of God makes this very clear and specific, as we'll see in these next verses:

### Verses 26-27:

*26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men, committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.*

Romans 1:26-27 (NASB)

Whether the world likes it or not, the Word of God gives the source of the passions of lesbianism and homosexuality. They are the results of denying the truth of God and exchanging it for a lie. Yes, these individuals do truly have these tendencies, and they might very well have been born with them, and the discussion always seems to revolve around whether it's right or wrong to practice them, but the scriptures don't argue that point, they everywhere forbid them, but perhaps more importantly, the scriptures declare that they are the effects of a society that has departed from God and are suffering the consequences. Sexual promiscuity precedes homosexuality, as well as wholesale adultery, and our society is fraught with all of these. The visible effects of our prolonged departure from the truth of God, and exchanging it for a lie, is being seen with rapidly escalating symptoms that are described with precise detail in the scriptures. But of course, few if any want to hear that. They want to keep their lie, because it makes them happy and soothes their consciences, what little they have left. That's what the exchange was all about, being able to hold to a lie right in the very face of the obvious truth of God. And the consequences will likewise be denied, no matter how obvious they might be. It is pointless to argue with someone who has deliberately chosen to believe a lie.

When the unnatural and indecent acts of lesbianism and homosexuality become so rampant that they can actually come out into the public and boast about it, and demand social acceptance, **and receive it**, then that nation has truly exchanged the truth of God for a lie. That nation has given up on any attempt to remain obedient to its Creator. They have made an exchange that will surely have consequences they don't want to think about. But, *7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will, from the flesh, reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will, from the Spirit, reap eternal life.* (Gal 6:7-8) As the ethics, and the morality decline, and as the violence increases, and as the economy suffers, those who have chosen the lie over the truth of God will stubbornly deny that these events are in any way related. But the warning has been issued, and the signs that God has posted are clearly evident, so man is without excuse in the sight of God. As a nation, and as individuals, what we sow is what we'll get. And we receive the penalty of our error in our own persons, meaning in our own bodies.

This particular class of sin is one that is perpetrated by oneself upon themselves, by their own doings, and they bring dishonor upon themselves by their own innate desires. But let's not think that they are any different than all of the rest of us, at least so far as our being innately sinful. In this case, as in all cases, God chooses to ease back His restraining force upon our behaviors, and allows us to push further and farther beyond the normal level of restraining boundaries. As we prolong our denial of God, He continues to relax His restraining force over our innate desires, and history has shown without question that humanity will sink to unthinkable depths of violence, brutality, and depravity without this ongoing restraint.

This is what Paul means when he says *God gave them over to degrading passions*. God did not have to **give** them degrading passions, He simply handed them over to the degrading passions that they already had, by relaxing His restraints in those areas. This is why nobody can accuse God of being the cause of their condition. They already have the condition, and God chooses to restrain it or not restrain it, based on His own good grace and concern for all of His children, and according their acceptance of Him and His truth. And this applies to all forms of sin, not just homosexuality. God doesn't have to put all these things into man, they are already there, but by the grace of God He restrains them within our own hearts and minds. And He does this in accordance to our acceptance and obedience to Him.

I was about to move on at this point, but I feel the need to add something more. We often hear God described a cosmic kill joy who delights in denying humanity all the things we want the most. But if you're a parent, especially of teenagers, then you know something that is undeniable. That your children will push the limits of behavior as far as you let them, even to their own harm or destruction. It is your love for your children, and deep concern for their welfare, that prompt your restraining intervention into their behaviors, not your desire to deprive them of their fun. You know that they will go as far as you let them go, they will stay out all night long, and get into God only knows what, if you don't get involved in their behaviors and set some restraints in place. Children will not restrain themselves without adult supervision.

Granted, some are worse and some are better, but all need adult supervision to stay out of danger and trouble. When we hear a parent claim they love their children too much to restrain and discipline them we know that's a lie, that's a clear declaration that they don't love them at all, or that they've just given up, because nobody who loves someone lets them do themselves harm without trying to prevent it. God's love for His children, all of them, is the motivation for His internal and external restraints on humanity. But, just like a parent can be worn down by an ungrateful child, so God will eventually take action on His children if they continue to deny Him and disrespect Him. And the resultant effects of God's relaxing His restraints on innate human behaviors are ~~some~~ very serious indeed. To demonstrate this, Paul goes on with the following description:

### **Verses 28-31:**

*28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;* Romans 1:28-31 (NASB)

Because these individuals, of this society and time period, *did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer*, God did not see fit to restrain their sin and depravity any longer, and He gave them over to a depraved mind. A mind that would do all kinds of things that are not proper. And then Paul presents a very lengthy list of these behaviors, all resulting from God's giving them over to their own depraved mind. Please take careful note that it does **not** say that God **gave them** a depraved mind, it says that God **gave them over to** a depraved mind. So where did the depraved mind come from? Simple, it was already there, being the result of the fall of mankind, but being kept under restraint by the grace of God. Paul describes the condition of mankind in chapter 3, verses 10-18, which we'll get to eventually, but these verses describe the divine assessment of all humanity. Which essentially is unrighteous and violent and who seeks only evil continually. Apart from the restraining power of God, man would bring swift destruction upon himself as a species.

Along with rampant promiscuity, pervasive adultery, and open, even "in your face" homosexuality, there's a whole gamut of natural effects of God handing a society over to their own innate depravity. *Being filled with all unrighteousness*, says Paul. And while this may not be an exhaustive list, it certainly is a lengthy list, and Paul begins to name several of them by name. *Wickedness, greed, evil, envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice* are among the group. When a person, or a society, or even a nation is being plagued by a rapid escalation of these things, and a growing tolerance for them, it's intended by God to be a warning sign to that person, or society, or nation, that He is removing His restraints because of a denial of Him and His truth. When a formerly God accepting society has gone too far, when it has intentionally chosen to disavow God and the truth that He has provided, and has made an exchange of that truth for a convenient lie to accommodate their unrighteousness, and when God has begun to react to that flagrant act of disrespect and ingratitude, then we see these things begin to rapidly escalate within that society.

And it isn't just sensual and lustful things, it's everything that holds a society together. It's matters of honesty and integrity, and fairness; and matters of compassion and mercy as well. It's heart attitudes and affections and appreciations; all those things that define a society and form it's broader perspectives and purpose of life. Healthy societies do not openly practice, nor condone others who do practice wickedness, and greed and evil and envy and murder. Strife and deceit and malice are not the proud virtues of a healthy society. Such things as these are known by all to be improper and unhealthy and not beneficial to a society. When gossip is practiced, and even promoted, where slander is commonplace, where God hating is perfectly acceptable, the occupants of that society will be insolent, and arrogant, and boastful of their wicked ways. They will be inventors of evil, always looking for and finding new ways and greater depths for satisfying their lust for depravity. They will be untrustworthy, unloving, and totally without mercy for anybody who disagrees with their own way of thinking. This is what mankind comes to when God steps back and loosens His restraints on man's innate depravity. God doesn't do this to mankind, God allows mankind to do this to himself, if they choose to deny the obvious truth of God and exchange that truth for a lie, for the sake of indulging their unrighteous desires.

We said earlier that this chapter was essentially a cause and effect chapter. The cause was presented in verses 18 through 23, and these verses, 24-31 are the immediate and consequential effects, the predicted results of that cause.

Just so we're sure, let's look once more at the initial cause of all of this:

*18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 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. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

Romans 1:18-21 (NASB)

The moral degradation, and eventual collapse of a society begins with a conscious decision to deny God. It is not a product of ignorance, but an act of knowingly denying the truth of God, and suppressing that knowledge solely for the purpose of indulging unrighteous behaviors. When a society makes this decision, it has turned off of the right road and started its journey on the road to perdition. Again, I want to make it clear that the Word of God declares that this is a conscious and informed decision, not an honest mistake, and it's made for an unholy purpose; the purpose of indulging unrighteousness. And this brings us to Paul's next verse that makes this point even more certain and more clear than it already is:

**Verse 32:**

*32 and 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.*

Romans 1:32 (NASB)

There's a familiar saying that states "misery loves company." And if that's true, then this is a good example. Paul says that those people who have chosen to practice any, or all of those things he's described in verses 24 through 31 know full well that God has forbidden these practices, and that He's declared that doing them anyway is just cause for a sentence of death when God judges mankind at His final Great White Throne judgement. They know that God has declared these things as capital offenses, for which He will render a sentence of death upon all who flagrantly persist in ignoring His warnings. But instead of being afraid, and ashamed of themselves for their disobedience, they go right on doing them themselves, and furthermore, give hearty approval and encouragement to as many others as possible to join them in their deadly folly.

It's one thing to make a decision to do something which you know you might one day regret, but what kind of person goes out of their way to encourage others to make that same dangerous error? To encourage anyone to openly disobey the ordinances of God, that He has declared are worthy of death, is one sad situation. But these ones Paul is describing are eager to do just that very thing. They are inventors of evil, they are insolent, and arrogant, and boastful. They are without understanding, they are untrustworthy, they are unloving, and they are completely without mercy toward others. If they have to suffer God's judgement in a burning torment, then they want all the company they can get. And they're pretty successful at getting it in a society that has chosen to suppress the truth of God and exchanged it for a lie that accommodates their unrighteousness. Now tell me, does any particular nation or society of our own day seem to fit into this dangerous pattern? Over and over, during His preaching on earth, Jesus would shout out to the people, "he who has an ear let him hear." I wonder if there's any among us today who have an ear to hear?

**Conclusion:**

We've now finished chapter one, but we aren't finished with the point that Paul is making concerning the condition of fallen mankind. That goes on for about another chapter and a half. But, Paul does make a switch at this point. From verse 18 to 32 he was speaking of those who deny God and suppress the truth about Him, but in chapter two he begins to speak of religious people, mostly Jews at that time, who claim that they do believe in God, and have His commandments, but still live just like the ones who deny God entirely. These are the religious hypocrites, and Paul is going to expose their error and folly just as well as he has these ones we've just discussed. We'll start to look at this in our next lesson.

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