

Impurity

This week, we will cover some of the same text as we did last week, but from a different perspective. Paul makes a point of condemning all unrighteousness in all its different forms.

Last week we saw Paul identify two types of revelation: special revelation that comes from God and is given through prophets and apostles that has been written down. Then there is general revelation that all unbelievers can see because it is evident to them. They can see it. This week, we see a process that goes on in the minds of those who reject and abandon God. In some cases, they even ignore general revelation that they can see. This includes both unbelievers but also believers.

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (not “gentiles”; not “Greeks” but “men” which can include Jews) who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

This verse starts with behavior that we normally associate with unbelievers. But, believers who have abandoned God do the same things. This is documented very clearly in the book of Judges. Herman told us, Paul is here setting up the Jewish and self-righteous readers. He gets them agreeing with him about how bad these ungodly people are. Then he lowers the hammer starting in chapter two.

Suppress the truth. We see this today. How many times do we see some item in the news that is suppressed as “fake news” even with lawsuits. Then months or years later we find that the truth was suppressed to “protect the guilty.”

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The book of Judges gives us a summary of this kind of behavior in chapter 2.

Judges 2:11 Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals,

Judges 2:12 and they forsook (also meaning abandoned) the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the Lord to anger.

Whether from peer pressure or from a desire to “fit in” (i.e. assimilate), people exchange their norms and standards they grew up with for those of the surrounding pagan culture. This often takes the form of anti-God activities.

Judges 2:13 So they forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtaroth.

Notice the pattern here. First, men from their own free will abandoned God. They did that. They did that in the book of Judges. They did that in Paul’s day. It is being done in our time. Mankind does this. It started in the Garden of Eden by a single act of faith in Satan’s half-truth/lie. We saw the solution previously in the first part of chapter 1 of Romans: the gospel, the good news which only requires faith. But Paul has shifted. He first shows that man starts down a road of abandoning God, just like in the book of Judges. Now there is a shift to God’s perspective.

Judges 2:14 The anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He gave them into the

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hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies.

Then when they have continually abandoned God, He “gave them” into deep suffering that was the result of their previous actions. Now the narrative shifts from mankind abandoning God to God giving them over without much restraint to their own evil ways.

Judges 2:15 Wherever they went, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had spoken and as the Lord had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed.

First, people abandon God from their own free will. This is not a single bad act. This is a string of bad acts glued together with mental attitude sins. It is still their own free will doing this. God has just removed restraints.

Then, God gives them into even greater evil in which they suffer. That is the pattern Paul is following in his argument in this part of Romans chapter 1. I suspect that Paul may have had the book of Judges in mind when he wrote this. He is following the same logic pattern as in the book of Judges. Note that word in Judges 2:14, “He gave them...” The Septuagint Greek equivalent of the Hebrew will show up very shortly in this passage in Romans. In other words, Judges chapter 2 and Romans chapter 1 are linked through the fabric of Scripture. The same root word will show up in Luke 22 about Judas “betraying” Jesus. More on that later.

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Romans 1:19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

Men are born with a basic sense that there is a God, even if they don't have that word to describe it. Even if they don't admit it.

I have mentioned before, the Catholic priest who studied languages and also the origin of the concept of God. His name is Wilhelm Schmidt. He was a German/Austrian priest. Here is some of the biographical information about him from Wikipedia:

“Schmidt’s main passion was linguistics. He spent many years in study of languages around the world. His early work focused on the Mon–Khmer languages of Southeast Asia, and on languages of Oceania and Australia. The conclusions from this study led him to hypothesize the existence of a broader Austric group of languages, which included the Austronesian language group. Schmidt managed to prove that Mon–Khmer language has inner connections with languages of the South Seas - one of the most significant findings in the field of linguistics.”

“From 1912 to his death in 1954, Schmidt published his 12-volume work *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee* (The Origin of the Idea of God). In it he explained his theory of primitive monotheism: the belief that primitive religion among almost all tribal peoples began with an essentially monotheistic concept of a high god — usually a sky god — who was a benevolent creator. Schmidt theorized that human beings believed in a God who was the First Cause of all things and Ruler of Heaven and Earth before men and women began to worship a number of gods:”

“Schmidt suggested that there had been a primitive monotheism before men and women had started to worship a number of gods. Originally

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they had acknowledged only one Supreme Deity, who had created the world and governed human affairs from afar.¹”

The concept of God is almost universal throughout history.

Romans 1:20 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.

I remember someone, perhaps in college, that once avoided listening to the gospel. He thought that if he did not hear the gospel he would have an excuse for not believing in Jesus Christ. The issue starts with an innate knowledge of God. If you reject God, you are going to reject the gospel unless/until you “repent” or change your mind. If you try to play games with God, you will lose every time.

Romans 1:21 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.

Throughout the Bible, especially in the New Testament, God is looking for our thanks. I was surprised to find it applied even to unbelievers. God expects “all” to thank Him. And we know that Christians are to give thanks in everything.

1 Thessalonians 5:16 Rejoice always;

1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing;

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_Schmidt_\(linguist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_Schmidt_(linguist))

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1 Thessalonians 5:18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

It is possible that I will take a detour in the next couple of weeks down the path of thanksgiving using Luke chapter 11 (10 lepers healed) as a text. In my travels through the Bible I find frequent emphasis on giving thanks to God. It is something that needs to be stressed from time to time.

Those who abandon God and give no thanks even for their own lives...God abandons to their own corrupt mind.

Romans 1:22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,

Romans 1:23 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.

So up to this point in the argument, Paul is documenting from God's perspective what unrighteous men did from their own free will. Men always seem to reject an invisible God who works powerfully in history and in their lives but then substitutes images of wood, stone and metal in His place.

Romans 1:24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

Judges 2:14 The anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He gave them into the

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hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies.

Notice that we now have a shift in the argument. It is now, as in Judges, God “giving them” over to something worse. The Greek word here in Romans is from the same basic word that is found in the Septuagint Greek version of Judges 2:14. If you go too far in continual abandonment of God, He takes off the restraints and lets you destroy yourself. It is the natural logical outcome of man’s unrighteous thoughts and deeds. For the believer, it can end in the sin unto death.

Romans 1:25 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.

Judges 2:13 So they forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtaroth.

Adam and Even exchanged the truth in the warning from God for the lie from Satan.

Romans 1:26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,

Romans 1:27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one

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another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

There is a natural function to parts of the body. Paul says this. If the norm among animals was homosexuality, that species would become extinct. Natural function is required to keep the species alive.

Romans 1:28 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,

Again, God gave them over. Perhaps you have met people who get into some form of sin, continually going downhill. At some point in this progression, they abandon all restraint. You see them on the streets of San Francisco. You see them on Skid Row in New York City. You see them on the streets of Portland Oregon. They have given themselves over to all unrighteousness. But, as long as they are still alive, there is still a chance they can change their minds and return to normalcy. A chance.

Romans 1:29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,

Romans 1:30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,

Romans 1:31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;

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Romans 1:32 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.

Leviticus 20:13 “If a man practices homosexuality, having sex with another man as with a woman, both men have committed a detestable act. They must both be put to death, for they are guilty of a capital offense.

There is a logic to this prohibition. If homosexuality was the norm, there would be few children produced. As a result, that society would dwindle and disappear.

We are not in ancient Israel. Homosexuality is legal in today’s world in many countries. But it is at odds with God’s word.

From God’s perspective, he created male and female. A family started with the marriage of a man to a woman. They produced children. That is the norm in the Bible.

There are still countries, predominantly Muslim that still abide by a law similar to the Mosaic prohibition against homosexuality.

From Wikipedia:

“As of April 2024, 62 countries as well as three sub-national jurisdictions have laws that criminalize sexual activity between two individuals of the same-sex. In 2006 that number was 92. Among these 62 countries, 40 of them not only criminalize male same-sex sexual activity but also have

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laws that criminalize female same-sex sexual activity. In 11 of them, sexual activity between two individuals of the same-sex is punishable with the death penalty.²”

From Wikipedia:

“The law of Saudi Arabia is uncodified; a Wahhabist interpretation of sharia, derived from the Quran and the Sunnah, is the basis of the law and justice system. In particular, the Quranic account of the prophet Lut and certain teachings of Muhammad in the Sunnah, as viewed in the Wahhabi tradition, inform the legal treatment of same-sex sexual activity and nonconforming-gender presentation. Homosexuality and transgender status or gender non-conformity are widely seen as immoral and indecent, and the law allows penalties for acts of homosexuality of capital punishment, prison sentences of indeterminate length (the maximum term is unknown), fines, flogging, and deportation for foreigners. During investigations and detentions, mistreatment of suspects and detainees, including beatings and torture, have occurred. Community violence against LGBT persons occurs.³”

Let us look at another application of Romans chapter 1. I sometimes use the phrase “sex, drugs and rock and roll” as a tag against the current depraved culture. It is a culture that wants to erase the culture I grew up in. I believe it is called by some, “cancel culture.”

What I understand from the phrase “sex, drugs and rock and roll.”

Sex with anyone anywhere at any time.

Drugs. Legalize hard drugs.

Rock and Roll. Immerse the culture in music that is devoid of God and stained with all kinds of evil activities.

2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sodomy_law

3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_rights_in_Saudi_Arabia

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Let us take one item and look at a current events. Drugs.

Oregon decriminalized some hard drugs in 2020. My understanding is that it made drug possession on a par with parking tickets (per NPR article at: <https://www.npr.org/2021/06/18/1007022652/oregons-pioneering-drug-decriminalization-experiment-is-now-facing-the-hard-test>) This is a complex issue. Oregon was trying to emulate the model accomplished by Portugal in emphasizing treatment for addiction. The implementation of the Oregon program was not similar to Portugal's. And some are frustrated by the failure of this program. Again from the NPR article:

“The state's Criminal Justice Commission records show about 9,000 people were arrested each year in Oregon for simple drug possession before Measure 110. Despite the drop in arrests, Ferraris says, "People are still committing crimes to get money, to buy dope, to support their habit. So how is this [decriminalization] going to impact that cycle?⁴”

From the New York Times: “When Oregon embarked on a landmark plan three years ago to decriminalize hard drugs, it wagered that a focus on treatment over punishment would create a new model for drug policy around the country.

“But after a deluge of overdose deaths and frequent chaos in the streets of Portland, Gov. Tina Kotek signed into law on Monday a measure to restore criminal penalties for drug possession. It brought to an end a key portion of one of the nation's most ambitious attempts to find alternatives other than jail for drug users, embodied in a 2020 voter initiative known as Measure 110⁵”

4 <https://www.npr.org/2021/06/18/1007022652/oregons-pioneering-drug-decriminalization-experiment-is-now-facing-the-hard-test>

5 <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/01/us/oregon-drug-law-portland-mayor.html>

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From the Atlantic magazine on-line: “Early results of this reform effort, the first of its kind in any state, are now coming into view, and so far, they are not encouraging. State leaders have acknowledged faults with the policy’s implementation and enforcement measures. And Oregon’s drug problems have not improved. Last year, the state experienced one of the sharpest rises in overdose deaths in the nation and had one of the highest percentages of adults with a substance-use disorder. During one two-week period last month, three children under the age of 4 overdosed in Portland after ingesting fentanyl.⁶”

It was so obvious that the plan failed, Oregon is going back to “recriminalizing hard drugs.” Just legalizing drugs doesn’t solve the problem. And many people who reject God for drugs will at some point spiral downward until they are homeless on the street.

It is sad that music has also mixed the sex drugs and rock and roll into an anti-God, sex and drug culture.

Paul has used “exchanged” and “gave them over” to set up a progression in the corruption of the human soul of those who reject God and His righteousness.

Verses	“They” Exchanged	God Gave Them Over to
23/24	Glory → Image	Impurity → Dishonor
25/26	Truth → Lie	Degrading Passions
26/28	Natural → Unnatural	Depraved Mind

6 <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2023/07/oregon-drug-decriminalization-results-overdoses/674733/>

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