

The Consequences of Rejecting Light

A Study on Romans 1:24-32

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There are some messages that a true minister of the gospel loves to present, but there are others he would rather bypass if possible. I would prefer to exclude this message, but as an expositor of the whole counsel of God, I must present it with conviction. I truly hope that you will not be offended because of the horrible and debased picture of man that Paul paints in these verses.

In Romans 1:18–3:20, Paul is setting out to prove that all men, Gentiles and Jews, are devoid of any righteousness before God. He seeks to prove that all men are guilty before the holy God, standing under his wrath, and will ultimately face eternal punishment unless they receive God's only answer to the sin problem — the death of Jesus Christ for sin.

In Romans 1:18-32, Paul shows that all Gentiles are guilty before the holy God and are under his wrath. These Gentiles are of every kind: the educated Greek; the cultured Roman; the wealthy American; the scientific Russian; and the ignorant bushman. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Paul's point is that sometime in the past Gentiles had a true concept of God as he revealed himself to them in nature, but the Gentiles, being sinners by nature, rejected this revelation. They had enough revelation of God to be condemned, but not enough to be saved. Salvation is found only in Christ. They knew that God existed, but they did not like to retain thoughts of him because it brought conviction to their souls. Thus, they turned to idolatry. Gentiles were originally monotheistic, but because of sin they became polytheistic.

The process of rejection went something like this: 1) Men willfully rejected God as he had revealed himself to them. 2) They made up their own code to live by and thought up their own concept of God, creating a works-based system of salvation. 3) They then made substitutes for God: idols. 4) With hardened hearts to God and his laws, they became immoral.

The purpose of this message is to show what happens when men reject the light that God has given them. What has been said of the Gentiles is true of each one of us, for they are our ancestors, and we have all inherited a sinful nature from our original human parent Adam. What has been said of the Gentiles is true of nations as well as of individuals. I will try to apply this message to the Gentile world of Paul's day, to us today as individuals, and to us today as a nation.

We must remember as we read this horrible list of sins that not all these things break out in every member of the human race, but that the seeds of all these things are an inherent part of the makeup of every one of us. One of the colossal blunders of the human race is the thinking that all men are naturally good, or that there is a divine spark in every man which must merely be fanned to flame.

Three times Paul said that God gave up the Gentiles for their rejection of the knowledge of God that they had (1:24,26,28).

GOD GAVE THEM UP TO IMMORALITY — Romans 1:24,25

“Wherefore.” The consequence of the rejection of the light God gave the Gentiles about himself was that God gave them up. He turned them over to their own evil deeds and let them destroy themselves through their own immorality. (See “the process of rejection” above.)

“God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves.” Because they rejected Him, God withdrew from the Gentiles his restraining grace and abandoned them to sin. Men abandoned God, so God abandoned men and left them to their own folly to destroy themselves through immorality. When men reject the light God has given them, God is under no obligation to give more light, and he has every right to abandon them for this rejection. Sin in the religious realm is often punished by sin in the moral realm. The rejectors then fell into immorality, making their own rules for morality and transgressing God’s laws for holiness of life. The result was sexual perversion of every kind, leaving God’s order for sex as stated in Scripture. At its root, sexual immorality is rejection of God.

There are those in responsible positions in the United States who are concerned about crime, immorality, and wanton living in this country. America has had a sound Christian foundation, but the nation today is rejecting her foundation and the result is immorality. Americans say, “We believe in God. We aren’t idolators!” Idolatry does not necessarily involve the worshiping of a stone or stick. It is any substitute for God (cf. Col 3:5 where covetousness is idolatry). Materialism, sex, prestige, and pleasure have become the gods of most Americans. All men are idolators if they reject the God of Scripture.

“Who changed the truth of God into a (the) lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” The Gentiles willfully exchanged the truth they had about God for a lie. This may refer to idolatry in general because the Old Testament called the gods of the Gentiles lies (Jer. 13:25). However, this may also refer to Satan who is the father of lies and idolatry. “Ye are of your father the devil,

. . . When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44). Men turned from God to Satan. They worshiped any created thing, even Satan, rather than worshiping God. What contempt!

GOD GAVE THEM UP TO UNNATURAL PRACTICES — Romans 1:26,27

“For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature.” The word for “women” here is a low form of the word “females,” indicating that they were lower than animals. The Greek says “female and male,” not “woman and man,” purposely withholding the more dignified term in order to show how contrary to nature and propriety their actions were. These women were guilty of lesbianism, unnatural relationships with other women.

“And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which was unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.” Men became guilty of homosexuality. This verse teaches that at the root of homosexuality is the rejection of God. Men learned and intentionally devoted themselves to homosexuality, manifesting utter contempt for God and the order he created.

The Greeks and the Romans, while producing some brilliant minds, did not condemn homosexuality. Even Plato, the great Greek mind, practiced it. The practice was also a part of many pagan religions.

Few sins are more degrading than homosexuality. It injures men’s health, changes their dispositions, renders many of its practitioners effeminate, debases their character, brings horrible guilt, and produces great mental strain. America in particular is guilty as a nation of these same sins, just as were the Gentile nations of Paul’s day. Today our culture condones and even endorses the bold “Gay Liberation Movement,” gay churches, gay teachers, gay businessmen and more. Just as the homosexual Gentiles in Paul’s day, our modern homosexuals are trapped beneath the weight of their sin and desperately need the forgiveness offered in Christ.

GOD GAVE THEM OVER TO A REPROBATE (REJECTED) MIND — Romans 1:28-31

“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge.” The Gentiles refused to retain an accurate concept of God. They loved their sin and wanted their own kind of god. They wanted to live as though the true God did not exist and as if they were not accountable to him. Men today talk of believing in a supreme being, but have their own

concept of God, conjecturing that he will tolerate their gross immorality. They reject the idea of a God of holiness and justice who will judge their sin. The picture Paul paints perfectly portrays most Americans, who want enough religion to be respected by all but little enough to be comfortable in their sins.

“God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.” The minds of the Gentiles were tested with the revelation of God, and they rejected God and failed the test. Men’s minds became so corrupted that they could no longer tell right from wrong.

“Being filled.” These people were filled to the brim with all kinds of sins. What Paul says of these heathen is true in all its essential features of men of all generations. Wherever men have existed, they have shown themselves to be sinners, ungodly and unrighteous, and so justly exposed to the wrath of God. The implication is that these Gentiles committed these sins without caring whether they were sins or not. When men sin and do not know that they sin, they stand condemned before God. But when men sin and do not care that they sin, they await an even more terrible judgment.

In this representative list, Paul names twenty-three sins that were common in his day, and that are by no means uncommon today:

“Unrighteousness” is the injustice men do to each other. It is the desire to oppress others, to give treat them inhumanly.

“Fornication” is any kind of promiscuous sexual activity, before or after marriage. Cicero spoke of fornication as unblamable, a thing universally allowed and practiced, and which he had never heard condemned, either in ancient or modern times. Similarly, rarely is a voice raised against premarital sexual relationships today. This is the age of sexual freedom, of liberation from all God’s restraints and from “Puritanical teachings.” The cry for “new morality” is simply old sin, sugar-coated in philosophical terms.

Some time ago Peggy Hart, who was working with Campus Crusade for Christ on the campus of the University of Colorado, wrote:

“The attitude of complete detachment isn’t just toward Christ, it is toward anything except drinking, sex, and all forms of gross immorality. These kids are hollow and empty, trying to fill the vacuum inside with beer and sex, which makes them emptier. I’ve never seen it so out and out before. Daily I talk to girls who talk only of sex and sleeping with guys.

“I’m not trying to be sensational or alarming. This is reality — the cold, hard facts of what the ‘sweetest, nicest, little freshman’ is faced with daily.”

Christians are not against sex — they are for it — but always in the marriage union. In this union, and only in this union, God has ordained that sex *should* take place.

“Wickedness” is moral defficiency of every kind. As early as the summer of 1966, Senator Herman E. Talmadge of Georgia made this statement at a Senate Prayer Breakfast:

“For too long now, most of the people have been indifferent to the fact of crime. In the past decade, we have seen crimes of violence increase 40%, and crimes against property rise 61%, although our population growth was only 10%. There is a forcible rape every twenty-six minutes; a robbery every five minutes; an aggravated assault every three minutes; a car theft every single minute; a burglary every twenty-eight minutes.”

“Covetousness” is the desire to have more, an itching for more and more. This is materialism at its peak!

“Maliciousness” is evil done intentionally and with no fear of breaking the law. Sadly, we also live in an age where there is very little respect for law and authority.

“Full of envy” means coveting what someone else possesses, being discontent with another’s superiority or advantage, or trying to “keep up with the Joneses.”

“Murder” is taking another’s life with an evil motive. It seems today that our society protects the murderer and criminal so that men are no longer afraid of the law of the land.

“Debate” describes a contentious person, a troublemaker, one who has a chip on his shoulder. There is much social unrest in our land today.

“Deceit” is an act of deception or a deliberate attempt to mislead. In our day deception is part and parcel of politics, business, and even religion. It has become, quite simply, a way of life.

“Malignity” is a disposition that makes the worst of everything.

“Whisperers” are those who secretly tell information that will hurt the character of others.

“Backbiters” practice open and unrestrained gossip which maligns others. Chrysostom said, “Gossip is worse than cannibalism.”

“Haters of God” are those who have carnal minds that are at “enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7). Today, men hate the true God of Scripture and often blaspheme against God openly and proudly.

“Despiteful” means insolent and insulting.

“Proud” describes an arrogant person, one who puts himself above others.

“Boasters” are pretenders and braggarts.

“Inventors of evil things” are people who constantly think up new vices, luxuries, tortures, etc. Unfortunately, in the name of entertainment, movie and television writers and producers often engage in this type of activity. Some people also try to stimulate their minds in this area by taking drugs.

“Disobedient to parents” describes disrespect for the family unit. Never before have children in this country flaunted their disobedience to parental authority as they do today.

“Without understanding” shows an inability to grasp or comprehend facts. People without understanding may rationalize their behavior. Alcoholics are a good example of this. There are more alcoholics in our country today than ever before.

“Covenant breakers” are those who are faithless and disloyal, those who do not keep their word. Today a man’s word means nothing. Neither does the word of a nation — treaties are often but scraps of paper.

“Without natural affections” is lacking the ability to love “loved ones,” such as family members. In the United States one out of every two marriages ends in divorce. A large percentage of homicides in this country take place in families or with “lovers.”

“Implacable” is the inability to get along with other people. It describes one who cannot be appeased.

“Unmerciful” means having no natural pity for suffering, being unforgiving and hard.

GOD'S JUDGMENT — Romans 1:32

“Knowing the judgment of God.” Those who do the sins listed above have a “still small voice” that tells them what they are doing is wrong and that they will eventually be judged by a righteous God.

“That they which commit such things are worthy of death.” The Gentiles, knowing God's judgment, realize these things will bring moral, physical, and spiritual punishment and death. Yet they continue to sin because they “love darkness rather than light.”

“Not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.” The Gentile not only does his own sin, but also actually delights, applauds, and approves when others do the same thing. “Misery loves company,” and “birds of a feather flock together.” Men rationalize away their sin because “everyone is doing it.” This salves the conscience, but it will not ward off the wrath of God which burns “against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom. 1:18).

CONCLUSION

I have painted a bleak picture of the Gentiles, our ancestors if we are not Jewish, and have shown that the crimes and sins of these ancients are the very same ones that plague us and our country today. Why? Because men are still rejecting the light that God has given them. America is rapidly becoming the kind of society in which the early church. The Greek and Roman cultures were very corrupt, but “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” True, this is a dark day for our country; our society has never needed Jesus Christ more than it does this very hour. It may be that God is about to abandon our nation for rejecting the gospel. Yet this can still be a glorious day for the gospel, for men today desperately need the forgiveness of sin and a purpose for living which only Christ can give. Christ alone can save a person or a nation from destroying itself through deep involvement and pleasure in sin.

The early church was made up of vile sinners who had been saved by grace (1 Cor. 6:9-11). How many people today would give anything for a new start in life because they have messed up their own lives so much? If only they could find forgiveness for the guilt that plagues their souls! To all who flee to him for salvation, Christ says, “Your sins are forgiven. Go and sin no more.”