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The Unworthy Mind

Today we will come to the conclusion of Paul's inspired analysis of the condemnation of pagan Gentiles. Pagan Gentiles are condemned by creation and are experiencing a present form of the wrath of God. To review, in Romans 1:18, a present form of the wrath of God is now being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who know the truth but are actively suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. Verse 19 sets forth the cause of the wrath, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them but they suppressed that truth. Verse 20 sets forth the beginning of what is known, the content of what is known and the inevitability of knowing. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen. All generations of all people in all places have seen and known the God of the creation. Note, Paul says, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. God has made Himself known to all men through creation and all men see Him clearly yet they do not acknowledge Him and therefore they have no defense. Verse 21 gives further explanation, For even though they knew God, that is to say, they once came to know Him, but when they did they did not honor Him as God or give thanks when it was their duty to do so. Because they didn't they became futile in their speculations and their foolish heart was darkened. The consequences are in the mind, in the thinking processes that re-interpret the creation in order to give an account for it without God. This is futility. In doing so, verse 22, they profess to be wise but in reality they are fools. They know exactly what they are doing and their case holds water. In verse 23 they make the critical exchange of worshipping the Creator for worshipping the creation; this is their ideological shift; exchanging 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. Verse 24, 26 and 28 sketch

the present realization of the wrath of God as a judicial penalty affecting moral behavior. Verse 24 is the penalty in the area of heterosexual immorality; God gave them over in the lusts of their heart to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. They were already entertaining these lusts but they were not acting on them until God loosed His restraint and gave them over to this unclean behavior. Verse 25 almost repeats verse 23 but with some nuances. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator. It is a terrible exchange to make; truth for the lie, worship and service of the Creator for the creature. The first major sign that a society is heading for self-destruction is the presence of rampant heterosexual immorality. Verse 26 is the second major sign that a society is far along the path of self-destruction; it is the rampant presence of homosexual immorality. He starts with the women. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural or contrary to nature. Homosexuality is contrary to our design features. Verse 27 he turns to the men, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and were inflamed in their desire toward one another. All their appetites were bent on satisfying this desire contrary to design. Men with men committing the shameless or disfiguring deed. The consequences of which are unavoidable. And receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. Today we'll go further into Paul's sketch but note the movement. How does this downward spiral progress? It starts with the theological problem of knowing God clearly through creation but not honoring Him as God or giving thanks. Instead they suppressed this knowledge. As a consequence God judges their mind. God darkens their thinking processes so that they are corrupt. Yet they are deluded into thinking that they are wise when in reality they are insane. Then, instead of becoming areligious they make an exchange and instead of worshipping God they worship the creation of God. And finally, at last it works out in their moral behavior; God looses the restraint so that they are permitted to engage in heterosexual, homosexual and the 21 corrupt behaviors in vv 28-32. So there is a serious penalty for not acknowledging and thanking God. People are not ignorant of God, they are willfully ignorant and it results in a distorted reality and a distorted behavior. They pay the penalty in themselves. So we need to focus our evangelism and apologetics on what Paul focused on at Lystra and Athens and everywhere he went. We have those two examples in Acts 14 and 17, which he sums up in Acts 20 as preaching

repentance toward God as step 1, and a preparatory step for preaching faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as step 2. Repentance toward God as a change of mind about God, the God they know but are suppressing and consequently distorting. In this step we are reminding them of the God with whom they have to do. For those who repent we move to step 2, proclaiming faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what Paul says he did everywhere. As Chafer says about this verse, "...repentance toward God could not itself constitute, in this case, the equivalent of "faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," though it may prepare for that faith."ⁱ An analysis of Paul's evangelistic and apologetic encounters bears out this meaning. Paul always preached repentance toward God first, then he brought faith in the Lord Jesus into the picture second. Why? Because if your view of God is all messed up because of what your mind has done to Him to suppress Him then you can't understand Jesus Christ. The one is the proper context for the other. And, of course, in this, you are praying, praying that the Holy Spirit will use the truth about God to bring them to repentance and then to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Okay, as we move into today's lesson, the final verses of Romans 1, I want to mention that someone brought up the issue of whether a believer can get caught up in the Romans 1 scenario? See, what a lot of people want to do is write people off as being unbelievers if they have any of the behaviors in these verses. So if someone is a homosexual then they couldn't possibly be a believer. Well, that's just nonsense. So let me scare you real good. What is happening in your mind when you are sinning? When you are doing some secret sin? You are acting like God is not there. You are acting like God does not exist. And if you act like God does not exist then your mind is being darkened, it is going into futility and you are reconstructing reality to meet your needs. And then if that sin isn't dealt with then your mind further degrades and you start to pump out alternative forms of Christianity. Why do you think most denominations are corrupt? It's because they're going through Romans 1 type of decay. They are re-interpreting the Bible to justify their beliefs and their behavior. Do you know there are churches that promote trading partners? That's fornication. There are churches that engage in pederasty, man-boy sex. And of course, there are churches that are endorsing homosexuality as a valid form of Christian marriage. So, yes, absolutely a Christian can go down through the decay of Romans 1. In other words, they may be saved from the penalty of sin, phase one, but they are not being saved from the power of sin, phase two. The gospel saves in all three phases but

only as verse 16 told us, when we are believing. But believers aren't always believing the Scriptures. When they reinterpret the Scriptures it just means they don't believe the Scriptures. That's all it means. The rest of all the talk trying to justify the reinterpretation is just hot air. But the bottom line is yes, you can get caught in a Romans 1 scenario as a genuine believer. Why is it that we can? Because we still have the sinful flesh. When we trusted Christ our sinful flesh didn't get eradicated. That happens in the resurrection. So we still have the capability of living according to the flesh and the things in Romans 1 are the lusts of the flesh. The sinful flesh is the pagan flesh. We still share that with unbelievers. It's just that we also have a new nature and that new nature is the instrument through which the perfect life of Christ is lived as we depend upon Him. So don't be naïve, don't think you are exempt, you have to stay on top of your spiritual life and constantly be studying the word and consciously living by the Spirit.

Now in verse 28 we come to the third section describing the present wrath of God upon those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. The two remarkable evidences of the present wrath of God were the heterosexual and homosexual behaviors. But here Paul opens up a whole can of worms; 21 things that come about as a result of God turning them loose to these behaviors. Now, a brief comment. The description here is remarkably close to the description of the world before the Flood when in Gen 6 it says, "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." That is a very bad commentary on that world. John Whitcomb said the world before the Flood was the worst world ever and the only world that would surpass it would be the world before the Second Coming of Christ, a world that we are rapidly heading toward. When people reject God then people turn into monsters and when the whole world rejects God there's no reason for God not to turn the whole world loose so they can have what they want and that world is going to be a living nightmare. This is one reason for the pre-trib rapture; as long as the rapture hasn't occurred God hasn't turned the whole world loose, Christ's bride is still in the world. When Christ takes His bride out of the world then the human heart will be allowed to do what God has never allowed it to do, even now He is restraining. But that restraint will be lifted and the total darkness that is man's heart will be unleashed to accomplish unspeakable horror. Trust me, I don't look into the dark abyss of man's heart as Paul is doing here but could I appreciate the light of Christ's

salvation apart from that dark background? Not with the full appreciation that God wants me to have for His Christ. Man is not good and if you are looking to man or government for salvation you are looking at utter futility. But let this arouse in you a true desire to worship the one true God and a compassion for the lost man and the answer, Jesus Christ.

So verse 28 depicts the judicial penalty as in verse 24 and 26, of God giving them over, that is, turning loose the restraint, letting them have what they want. **And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind...** Now the structure is that they did something and so God did something. They didn't acknowledge God in their mind and so God gave them over to a depraved mind. But there is a play on words in the Greek It's the adverb **just as** that sets up this word play. The word play is between the words translated **see fit to acknowledge** and **a depraved**. You can't see it in most English translations. If the translators wanted to show it they would have translated it this way, "And just as they did not *think it worthy* to have God in their knowledge any longer, God gave them over to *a worthless* mind." In other words, this is just compensation. God is always just. He doesn't just penalize arbitrarily. He penalizes in accordance with His justice. So if they didn't think it worthy to have God in their knowledge then God judges their mind by turning it over to worthlessness. The wordplay itself is *εδοκιμασαν...αδοκιμον* and you may be able to see from the similarity of the word the interplay.

Now when it says that they did not think it worthy to have God in their knowledge we can highlight two things. First, did they have God in their knowledge? Of course. You can't rightly not think it worthy to have God in your knowledge if you don't have God in your knowledge. In fact, the word for **knowledge** here is *επιγνωσκω* and means "full knowledge. They had a full knowledge of God. They were not ignorant of God at all. Second, are they still capable of making judgments? Sure, they made a value judgment on having God in their knowledge. They said we do not think it is valuable to keep God in our knowledge. Do you think they are going to be held accountable for that? Yes. They will have no excuse. Humans are responsible agents meaning they will answer to God for the value judgments they have made in this life.

In fact, they are already paying the price for a poor value judgment since the knowledge of God is the most worthy knowledge possible. And they judged it unworthy. There is nothing better to have in your knowledge than a right knowledge of Him. Why? Because a right knowledge of Him is the necessary basis for knowing everything else. So if someone rejects the knowledge of Him they reject the basis for knowing anything correctly. Note that I did not say that they do not know anything correctly. I said that they do not have a basis for knowing anything correctly. Those who reject Him can still know some things correctly for two basic reasons. First, because they are made in His image and they can never escape being made in His image. Second, because they live in His world and they can never escape living in His world. So their consistency or inconsistency to their rejection of the basis for knowing anything is directly proportional to how much knowledge they truly have. But we would add quickly that if unbelief was taken to its logical conclusion then they would have no knowledge whatsoever. It's just that by God's common grace no one is completely consistent to their rejection. And it's because of this that when they are inconsistent we are given an opportunity to challenge them to give us a basis for that knowledge. Paul used this with the Athenians when he said, even as your own poets have said. He was saying, your poet knows God is there and he admits it in his poetry. And I'll show you some poetry later and you'll see again that they do know and they show us at times that they know and it's then that we are given an opportunity to say something that might stimulate some thinking. Key words to be listening for are words like, "that's right and that's wrong." On what basis? Or this should be or that ought to be? On what basis. Such statements are consistent only with the Christian worldview. So if they think the knowledge of God is worthless then God gives their mind over to worthless thinking. What are the consequences of worthless thinking? Worthless living. Which is what Paul says next.

Now the worthless mind we should define. It is the "base mind", the "corrupt mind." Technically, it is a mind that does not pass the test. And Paul says this mind is given over **to do those things which are not proper**. These are all things that are not "appropriate, not fitting." They are crimes against humanity and shocking though it may be, verse 32 says that those who commit these things know that they are worthy of capital punishment. It's amazing to me to think that the people who are against capital punishment actually know that they should be capitally punished. They know that! They

are just playing games. It is all a farce. What you see is not what you get with people. They are living a lie!

The 21 things listed here are worthy of death and some of these words in the original are downright scary. I'll point them out. I want to make three comments on the list of 21 things before we get into each word. First, the list is known in the ancient world as a 'vice list.' The NT has several 'vice lists.' For example, in Matt 15:19 Jesus refers to the evil that comes out of the heart, in Gal 5:19-21 Paul lists the deeds of the flesh, in 1 Tim 1:9-10 Paul lists the deeds of the lawless rebels and in 1 Pet 4:3 Peter lists the desires pursued by the Gentiles. This is another vice list. Second, the 'vice lists' are representative only. None of the lists contain all the condemned behaviors. Paul's list of the deeds of the flesh could be greatly expanded but a sampling was sufficient to communicate the point. So the vice lists are partial lists and if some specific vice is missing it does not mean it is not a vice. Other vices could be added to the list though this list in Romans 1 is the most complete of all the 'vice lists.'

Looking at the list we find in verse 29 that they are **being filled** or "have been filled," perfect tense, such that they remain **filled with unrighteousness**. They are brimful of evil. The meaning is quite like that of God's description of men before the Flood, that the only thought of their heart was only evil continually. The Hebrew here refers to a great amount of continuously evil thoughts. That was the worst world ever and Jesus will not come back to judge the whole world until it is even worse. We are rapidly marching towards that world.

The expression **filled with unrighteousness** is like a box and everything that follows is now unpacked from the box. The first think in the box is **wickedness**. This word means "to be in a state or condition where there is a lack of moral and social values." It refers to going beyond reasonable or predictable limits. When morals plummet to a level that the prior generation says they could never have predicted, the society has reached wickedness. In my estimation, our society has undoubtedly become wicked. The second word is **greed**. This word means "the state or desire to have more than one's due." Unquestionably, we live in a society where greed has become the order of the day. Corruption answers to greed in its unscrupulous dealings in order to satisfy its insatiable lust. The elite NWO groups are fundamentally greedy.

They got on top and they want to stay on top and they will do anything to stay on top. They will oppress you and steal from you; they have and they are. Don't be fooled. We are ruled by a greedy global elite. The third word is **evil** but probably better translated as "malice." What's malice? Malice is a desire to see others suffer. That's what's going on in this country. The rulers want to see the common people suffer. That is malice and it is a deep seated consequence of not thinking it worthy to have God in their thinking. They've been given over to a worthless mind. The fourth is not a word but an expression. Verse 29, they are **full of envy** or "jealousy." Note they are not just jealous, they are full of jealousy meaning they are brimful of jealousy and overrun with it. They cannot stand for others to have and them to not have. They want what you have simply because they don't like you having it and them not having it. They are full of jealousy and it controls their whole outlook and behavior in life. God gave them over to this for rejecting Him. The fifth behavior is **murder**, the meaning of which is clear enough. It is the destruction of the image of God. However, the adjective **full of** is to be applied to this genitive too. They are full of murder. The fullness speaks of the multitude of manners in which they commit murder. It is not always the kind of violence you imagine with guns, it is that but it is chemicals in your drinking water that affect your body but are said to be good for you, it is deprivation of nutrients in food that are said to be more nutritious but are not, it is abortion that is defined by psychology as a disease to be treated, it is geriatricide under a false definition of quality of life. The manner of multitude of murder is legion and it is occurring around us every day. My only question is, where are the voices crying out against it? The sixth behavior God gave them over to, again, which they are **full of**, is **strife**. The Greek word *εριδος* means "contention." They are contentious people, always looking to engage in rivalry. They are deliberately quarrelsome. They find it enjoyable to exacerbate every issue in order to get in a contentious dispute with them. The seventh behavior God gave them over to is **full of deceit**. The Greek word *δολου* means "treachery." This refers to their methods as underhanded. They fight but when they do they hit below the belt. They take every advantage they can to break the rules. Does this go on? The better question is when does it not go on? The eighth behavior in the most extensive vice list of the NT is they are full of **malice**. The Greek word *κακοηθειας* means "mean-spirited." They are just plain "mean-spirited." They don't care about you; they care only about themselves. They are mean. They intend mean. They want to hurt you. It is not accidental. It is planned. The ninth

behavior God turns them over to is **gossip**. The word means they are rumormonger's, constantly spreading rumors, sometimes known as a "whisperer," someone who secretly spreads malicious things about someone's character as opposed to someone who does it openly. The tenth behavior they are characterized by is **slanderers**. This is the word that is the open spreading of malicious things about someone's character. So while a gossipper does it secretly, a slanderer attacks your character openly. Does this go on in society? Especially in politics but yes, in every realm of our society. The eleventh behavior they are given over to is they become **haters of God**. This word is interesting because it can mean they "turn against God." The word aptly applies to the modern anti-theists like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens who have made it their mission to assault someone they deny exists. They hate God. The ACLU hates God. They want God removed from our society. The word, however, can also mean "destitute of God" or "without God." They reject all His work in their life, they are without God. But finally it can mean one who blames God and these people are a dime a dozen. If things are good in life they give themselves credit. If something bad happens they blame God. The twelfth description of their character is they are **insolent**. The Greek word means "a violent aggressor." The apostle Paul used this word to describe himself prior to his conversion on the Damascus Road (1 Tim 1:13). These people are violent in opposition to Christians and the truth of Christianity and even to the idea of God in general. The thirteenth word is **arrogant**. This word refers more to their "haughty" attitude whereas the fourteenth word, **boasters**, refers more to the external display of pride by bragging. The fifteenth word, and this is where they get interesting, is **inventors of evil**. This word means "one who forms strategies to effect something." They are thinkers of evil. I think again of the NWO and the masterminds of evil behind the national leaders of the world. They contrive evil in order to stay in power. The sixteenth word is **disobedient to parents** and I especially harp on this one because it reflects lack of respect and authority orientation and I find more and more that children disobey their parents and the parents let them get away with it. Oh, I'm going to put you in time-out or I'm going to take away your toy and the kids hate their parents for it. Kids need authority, they need the lines drawn and they need to know that if they cross that line their parents love them enough to discipline them for it. This is a tell-tell sign that our culture has gone to pot and it is very sour and you better get ready for the next generation because they're already around and they are wildly different from

previous generations, no pun intended. In verse 31 we find the seventeenth word and this one is very interesting, **without understanding** or “void of understanding.” The word refers to two rivers joining such that after the confluence they are indistinguishable from one another. What it refers to here is the joining of persons inwardly in organizations such that they share a common understanding, or in this case, misunderstanding, implying a lack of morality accompanying that understanding. So the groups, the community organizations, the social groups, the secret societies, all these groups are people coming together and sharing an inward thought process that is devoid of any real understanding. The eighteenth one is also interesting, **untrustworthy**, but the Greek word means “covenant breakers,” those who “break agreements,” “break treaties.” These people can’t keep their word even if they are bound in a contract, they are contract breakers and these kinds of people are what ruin economies. They can’t keep their word and it doesn’t matter because the government bails them out. This nineteenth one I really like: **unloving** but it might better be translated “unfeeling.” These people lack in good feelings for others. Like when Obama doesn’t salute soldiers or does some other foul thing that is totally lacking in feeling for others. The lexicon says they lack good feelings for others and thereby jeopardize the maintenance of good relationships both political and familial that are essential to well-ordered society. They marginalize people. Number twenty, **unmerciful** and the word refers to a lack of compassion. They just don’t have compassion for others. You read that list and you tell me God hasn’t turned over a large portion of our society to these ends.

But that’s not even the worst of it. The worst of it is verse 32, **and although they know the ordinance of God, they know** and here we’re already moving into conscience, this is a transition verse as we move from Paul’s analysis of pagan Gentiles to his analysis of more cultured Gentiles. The two sections begin to bleed together here. **They know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death.** They know this, they know the crimes are worthy of capital punishment, yet what do they do? **The not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.** This is the absolute end of a society, when wrong is right and right is wrong. Everything is upside down. Do you feel that way sometimes in our society? I feel it a lot. And I would say the most perverse form of this is when it is practiced in the legal sphere, when there is legislation that is made that authorizes practices that are worthy of death.

That means the one's making the legislation are involved in the hideous practices themselves. They not only do the same but give hearty approval to those who practice them by legalizing the practices! That way they can feel good about themselves because "It's legal!" Abortion is legalized murder.

But if you get nothing else out of this, the abortion is not the root of the problem; it's a fruit. The root is the theological error of rejecting the knowledge of God. They don't think it worthy to keep God in their knowledge so God makes their mind worthless. Go think about that because these people are lost, they're culpably lost but they are lost nonetheless and they need Christ. They need to be confronted by God and they need to repent concerning God and then be presented with Jesus Christ and the need for faith in His finished work on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Apart from Him, futility.

In conclusion I leave you with this modern poem. Paul quoted the ancient pagan poets, I quote a modern one:

We believe in Marxfreudanddarwin.
We believe everything is OK
as long as you don't hurt anyone,
to the best of your definition of hurt,
and to the best of your knowledge.

We believe in sex before, during, and
after marriage
We believe in the therapy of sin.
We believe that adultery is fun.
We believe that sodomy's OK.
We believe that taboos are taboo.

We believe that everything's getting better
despite evidence to the contrary.
The evidence must be investigated
And you can prove anything with evidence.

We believe there's something in horoscopes,

UFO's and bent spoons; Jesus was a good man just like Buddha,
Mohammed, and ourselves.

He was a good moral teacher although we think
His good morals were bad.

We believe that all religions are basically the same—
at least the one that we read was.

They all believe in love and goodness.
They only differ on matters of creation,
sin, heaven, hell, God, and salvation.

We believe that after death comes the Nothing
Because when you ask the dead what happens
They say nothing.

If death is not the end, if the dead have lied, then its
compulsory heaven for all
excepting perhaps
Hitler, Stalin, and Genghis Khan.

We believe in total disarmament.
We believe there are direct links between warfare
and bloodshed.

Americans should beat their guns into tractors
and the Russians would be sure to follow.

We believe that man is essentially good.
It's only his behavior that lets him down.
This is the fault of society.
Society is the fault of conditions.
Conditions are the fault of society.

We believe that each man must find the truth that
is right for him.

Reality will adapt accordingly.

The universe will readjust.

History will alter.

We believe that there is no absolute truth
excepting the truth

that there is no absolute truth.

We believe in the rejection of creeds,
and the flowering of individual thought.”ⁱⁱ

If chance be
the Father of all flesh,
disaster is his rainbow in the sky,
and when you hear

State of Emergency!
Sniper Kills Ten!
Troops on Rampage!
Whites go Looting!
Bomb Blasts School!

It is but the sound of man
worshipping his maker.”ⁱⁱⁱ

This is the futility of the pagan mind. Once you’ve rejected the God of the Bible the only thing left is Chance. Chance is god and anything can happen. Why not murder, rape and steal? There’s no reason not to. Give me one good reason not to. There’s no reason not too much less any reason for anything at all. This is futility and unbelievers know it! Christian’s are duped if they think they don’t know these things. They know it well, they’re hiding from Him. And it’s very, very sad.

ⁱ L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, p 377-78.

ⁱⁱ Steve Turner, “Creed,” *Up to Date* quoted by Ravi Zacharias in *Can Man Live Without God?* p 42-43.

ⁱⁱⁱ Turner, “Chance.” Quoted by Ravi Zacharias in *Can Man Live Without God?* p 43-44.

[Back To The Top](#)

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