
Romans 1: Ancient Message for the 21st Century

By Darrow Miller

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The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, Romans 1:18



With this overarching statement, Paul opens his short course on the power of worldview (Romans 1:18 -32). God’s wrath stands against the rebellion and disbelief of the whole human race. God is indignant with sin and sinner alike for two primary reasons. First, human sin violates God’s nature and the moral order of the universe. Second, this rebellion has real-world consequences which are ruinous both for individuals and for society as a whole.

In the modern/postmodern world we cringe at the harshness of the word “wrath.” Yet it reminds us that we live in a moral universe, a cosmos fashioned by a perfect God. This God has expectations for human behavior. Notwithstanding the cultural narrative shaped by atheism, we do not inhabit an amoral universe of our imaginations.

Humans reject the truth

And what is it that so displeases God? Man’s universal rebellion, manifested in two ways : godlessness - *asebeia*: “to live in a manner contrary to proper religious beliefs and practice” and wickedness - *adikia*: an activity which is unjust – “unjust deed, unrighteousness, doing what is unjust.” The rebellion is against God’s moral order, the Ten Commandments. This decalogue is divided into two tablets, and human rebellion defies both sets of commandments. Matthew Henry characterizes the commandments this way: “ungodliness against the laws of the first table, unrighteousness against those of the second.”¹

The first tablet contains four commandments describing man’s proper response toward God, i.e. godliness. Man rebels against this frame; he evidences godlessness. These four commands indicate that the highest responsibility of mankind towards God is worship given exclusively to the living God. Violation of these four commands manifests godlessness of the heart and mind.

Such a person is without piety, failing to worship the living God. This failure has implications for the second tablet.

The second tablet, addressing behavior toward one's fellow human, is grounded in the first. An unfitting response to God, violation of the first tablet, leads to wicked behavior toward humans, violation of the second tablet. This tablet contains six commandments toward our fellow human beings. These are intended to guard against:

- Dishonoring parents – the most profound violation of generational respect,
- Murder – the most profound injustice against an individual,
- Adultery – the most profound violation of marriage,
- Stealing - the most profound injustice of enterprise and economic prosperity,
- Lying (false witness) - the most profound injustice against the rule of law and social cohesion,
- Coveting – the most profound injustice toward a person's social framework.

When we violate these commands we expose our wickedness. These are deeds of injustice. They lead to death, broken families, enslavement and poverty. They incur moral guilt on the part of the violator. They lead to God's wrath.

Then we come to this fascinating phrase "suppressing the truth." Note that truth is suppressed, not ignored, abandoned or forgotten. It is suppressed. The Greek word translated "suppress" is *katechō*: "prevent, hinder, restrain, keep from." The verb is in the present tense and active voice which indicates that human beings are choosing to actively and continually suppress the truth.

As a child I had a Jack-in-the-Box. It was fun to push the little clown into the box and turn the crank to watch him pop up. The Jack was spring loaded. It did not go down easily. You had to push the Jack down and quickly close the lid. Once the Jack was suppressed, it could be released again to my delight.

Truth is like the Jack-in-the Box. It is "spring loaded." It wants to be out of the box. It is out of the box unless humans suppress it.

Truth corresponds with reality

The second thing to note is that truth is not static or inert. It is dynamic, forceful. It pops up all over. A person cannot simply ignore the truth. If you do not want to engage with truth, you must actively and continuously suppress it.



Truth is the English equivalent of the Greek word *alētheia*, “truth, i.e., that which is in accord with what really happens, facts that correspond to a reality, whether historical (in the time/space continuum), or an eternal reality not limited to historical fact.”² Truth corresponds to what is real. It has universal character and meaning. Modern and postmodern relativism speaks of “my truth,” but that is a fallacy. Truth is not based on an inner feeling, not grounded in human emotions or even human experience. Nor is truth merely pragmatic, as in “I tried Christianity but it didn’t work for me.”

No, truth corresponds with reality. It is objective truth, or as the great Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer used to say, “Truth with a capital T, true Truth.” This remarkable word not only tells what it is, it implies what it is not. The word attaches a negative particle to *lanthano*, which means “to be hidden.” For the Greeks, truth was hidden, “it was out there.” It was mysterious. But Christ, “full of grace and truth,” brought us *aletheia*, the revealing of what had been hidden.

Lanthano is captured in the unveiling of a new sculpture. The covering is removed, what was hidden is now revealed. God’s revelation makes known the truth that is hidden. That which has been covered is now uncovered so that all can see ... and touch. Truth corresponds with reality. It is “hard,” objective truth, not “soft” or fuzzy, not subjective.

We see this hard reality when Jesus greets Thomas after the resurrection. Thomas, of course, was unequivocal in his doubt. “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it,” John 20:25 NIV. But when the skeptical disciple was confronted with the risen Christ, he changed his tune.

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’

Or as the apostle John testifies, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life,” 1 John 1:1 NIV.

The resurrection was historically verifiable. It happened in space-time history. This is the nature of Christianity. It comports with reality. It is based on actual historical events that can be critically examined. It can be seen, touched, felt. Paul is arguing that God has revealed himself in this way. But human beings have suppressed the truth. They want to keep it hidden, under wraps, so they don’t have to deal with it. But God’s truth has been revealed so that everyone might see. How? God made invisible things visible through His creation.

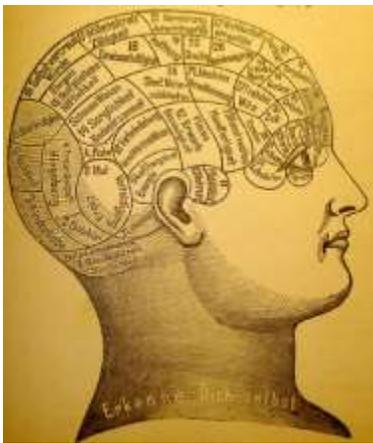
God put the invisible in plain sight

In verses 19-20 Paul argues that truth is clearly revealed for all individuals to see.

... since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. Romans 1:19–20

Paul continues his argument that though God is invisible, he is “able to be known” through the visible things he has made. In fact, “what can be known about God is plain to them.” It is manifest. Evident. Widely known and well known. All these are included in the definition of the word “plain.” There is *clarity* in general revelation. There is clarity in the creation external to man and internal to man. In the revelation *external* to man we see clarity in:

- The macrocosm³ - universe to the billions of stars and galaxies, extending farther than our greatest telescopes can see.
- The micro universe⁴ that we cannot see with our naked eye, the exquisite universe of cell walls, the cell nucleus, chromatin, DNA and finally, into the subatomic universe of electrons and protons and beyond.
- The midpoint of this vast outer-space and inner-space is the scale that man inhabits, this small speck by cosmic standards and gigantic by microscopic terms is the blue planet that we call earth and is the home of mankind.⁵ (See [this video](#) to get a sense of this grandeur and majesty.)
- The beauty of the creation⁶ that we so enjoy, a beauty that at times stuns us with its overwhelming grandeur and exquisiteness.
- The laws⁷ that govern the macro- and microcosm and the structure that binds them. They all point to the teleos⁸ – purpose and the Purposer who created them.
- The wonder of human sexuality, obviously designed male and female for complementary fitting together with the purpose of procreation, conceiving new life, and the formation of families.⁹



In the revelation *internal* to man, we see clarity in that:

- We are made in the image of God. We share some of His attributes: a mind¹⁰ – attributes of intellect and reason; a heart¹¹ – moral attributes recognizing right and wrong and having moral motions; and a will¹² – attributes of purpose.
- We explore creation, think God's thoughts after him.
- We are creative in the realm of music, art, poetry, dance, etc.¹³

- God's moral law has been written in the heart of man (Romans 2:14-15).

No such thing as an atheist

The created order, inside and outside of man, reveals with absolute clarity that God exists and the nature of His character. This is so clear that human beings who deny God's existence (aka *atheists*) are "without excuse." In fact, from the standpoint of the Bible, there is no such thing as an atheist, if we define atheist as someone who does not believe in God. There are only people who profess atheism, who say "I don't believe in God" but are suppressing the truth. To return to an earlier illustration, they are intentionally shoving the "Jack" (their knowledge of God) into the "box" of their own closed mind.

At any rate, the professing atheist dismisses Paul's argument out of hand. Such a mindset, sadly, can conceive of nothing beyond the material realm.

A theist, on the other hand, understands that reality is both physical and spiritual. What is more, a relationship exists between these two realms. And quite significantly, the material world reveals the non-material Creator.

Now it must be stated that while God's existence "can be known" through His creation, that knowledge is dimmed. (*Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face*, 1Co 13:12 NIV.) As finite human beings, we may know truly of God's existence but not exhaustively of His nature.

God has revealed Himself in four ways. Two are called special revelation by theologians: God's *written* word and the *living* Word, Jesus Christ. Two are called general revelation (that which is available to all humankind): God's works as seen in *humanity*, made *Imago Dei* (the image of God), and His works in the *rest of creation*.

In this text the apostle Paul is writing about general revelation. The first testimony is inside man. The KJV clearly reflects this innate dimension of witness: "that which may be known of God is manifest **in them**." The writer uses the preposition *en*, "in, inside, within."

All creation speaks of God

One declaration of God's existence is the internal witness of our own identity, being made in the image of God.¹⁴ The human body is the happy abode of the human spirit. We are like God, and unlike the rest of creation, in that we have been given a mind – attributes of intellect, a heart – moral attributes, and a will – attributes of purpose. All these are attributes of God.

The second witness is outside of man, the rest of creation, "being understood from what has been made." The created order, the laws and ordinances that govern the creation, speak to us of the reality of God. From the beauty and majesty of *outer* space—galaxies and star systems, to the wonder and complexity of *inner* space—the "language of creation" found in the genetic code and the structure of the DNA, the creation speaks of God.

For all time, since the creation of the world, from our first parents to the present human family, God has revealed himself through his creation. The Psalmist captures this:

*The heavens **declare** the glory of God; the skies **proclaim** the work of his hands. Day after day **they pour forth speech**; night after night they **reveal** knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet **their voice** goes out into all the earth, **their words** to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun. Psalm 19:1-4*

Paul uses a figure of speech (called *polyptoton* if you're interested) with his repetition of "plain." *Since what may be known about God is plain (phaneros; an adjective meaning "evident, clearly known, clearly seen, visible") because God has made it plain (The NIV renders this second "plain" as another adjective but it's actually a verb, phaneroō, meaning "cause to be seen; be disclosed, be displayed; make known, reveal, show to them.")* The long and the short of the declaration is that God has "disclosed" it so that it is "clearly seen."

What has been revealed by the created order? The invisible Creator of that order. The universe is real and it manifests a factual order. This stands in stark contrast to the postmodern world where truth is seen as a social construct, void of objective reality.¹⁵ God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—"have been clearly seen" or "perceived." The created order reveals two things to all who will see. First, *God's existence*, and second, *His supremacy and character*.

Moral creator, moral creation: why atheists deny God

The creation makes visible the invisible. This seems like a conundrum. How can this be? How can the invisible be visible? God's invisible, moral character is revealed in His creation. "Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities ... have been clearly seen," Romans 1:19-20.

Paul states that these things are "being understood (i.e. "reflected on with insight") by what has been made," that is, by God's "workmanship." That wonderful word workmanship comes from the Greek term *poiēma*, from which we also derive "poem." The creation and humankind are the workmanship, the *poiēma* of God. And the workmanship reveals the craftsman. An author is made visible by the words in his book. The painter is seen by her work on the canvas. The potter is revealed in the finished vase, the poet in her poetry, the choreographer in the dance, the aircraft designer in the structure and function of the plane, the architect in the building, etc.

The creator's existence and aspects of his character are revealed through his art.¹⁶ The visible is always a reflection of the unseen creator. At the level of the Primary Creator and His creation, the apostle Paul says this reflection is so unmistakable that people who deny the creator are without excuse.

Imagine visiting a Dutch museum that housed a collection of Rembrandt's paintings. If you spent the day reflecting on the collection, what might you learn about the painter? You could learn about the world he inhabited, the clothing people wore, the food they ate, the housing they lived in. You could learn the things he was interested in, the stories he was telling through his painting, his vision and perspective of life. On a technical side you could learn about how he painted, how he put the base on the canvas, how he used color and light, how he used his brush and palate. You appreciate this master, but you also could learn a lot about the man simply by viewing his art.



Now suppose, as you were leaving the museum, a friend said, "This was a wonderful day. These paintings were magnificent. But of course there was no Rembrandt. These paintings have the appearance of design, but it's all just an illusion. All this art came about by accident, by random chance and time. If you put oil paints and canvas in a room, and allow the forces of nature enough time, they'll eventually combine in a way that gives you these 'paintings.' No artist is required."

How would you respond? "Are you crazy? Are you stupid?" Yet this is exactly the argument being put forth by popular and influential defenders of Darwinism, such as Richard Dawkins. He basically argues that yes, creation gives the distinct appearance of intelligent design, but that is just an illusion. Let's call this what it is: suppression of the truth.

Every day people suppress the truth. They look at the creation and deny the existence of the Creator. This denial is absurd. A code is impossible without a code maker. A word is not born without a word maker. Without a poet there can be no poem. And yet, every day, people draw such irrational conclusions. This is the framework of the modern naturalistic society.

Without excuse

As Paul argues, and creation witnesses, God's workmanship reveals His existence and something of His nature and character so that people are without excuse. From the revelatory point of view of the created order, there is no excuse for a human to deny God. The Greek word, *anapologetos*, makes it very clear, "that which cannot be defended," "inexcusable." There is no defense! To deny God and reality is to live in a world of delusion.

Delusion is exactly what the postmodern generation is living in today, a world of make believe. Young people are increasingly denying reality and creating false stories, building an illusionary

framework to explain their lives, their meaning, their sexuality. What is needed today is factual and moral clarity.

Nationally syndicated radio talk show host Dennis Prager is fond of saying: “I prefer clarity over agreement.” It is more important to have clarity on what is real and what is good than to attempt to reconcile irreconcilable differences for the sake of agreement.

It is important to seek peace and live in harmony, but not at the expense of truth and moral clarity. In this day of moral and cultural relativism, living at peace often means accepting as real things that are unreal, as evil things that are good.

I am reminded of Francis Schaeffer’s analysis of our current situation. Almost a half a century ago he foresaw where we would be today in the midst of the culture wars:

These two world views [Judeo-Christian theism and Secular Humanism] stand as totals in complete antithesis to each other in content and also in their natural results —including sociological and governmental results, and specifically including law ... It is not that these two worldviews are different only in how they understand the nature of reality and existence. They also inevitably produce totally different results. The operative word here is inevitably. It is not just that they happen to bring forth different results, but it is absolutely inevitable that they will bring forth different results.

To seek to reconcile the irreconcilable is foolish. Such effort distorts the nature of reality and morality.

Recently I have been in discussion with a good friend, Surrendra Gangadean, a theologian and moral philosopher, about what he calls the “Doctrine of Clarity and Inexcusability.” His writing on the subject has caused me to reflect further on the nature of how God has revealed himself to all human beings.

The clarity of common revelation, the revelation of creation to all human beings, is so persuasive that people who deny God are without excuse.

Why do people deny God ?

So why do we deny him? For moral reasons. We want to live in a universe without moral restraint. We want to be completely autonomous, gods unto ourselves, and laws unto ourselves. We want to be “free” to live without moral guilt or moral boundaries. We are dealing with something ancient here. This is the very temptation of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. But a life without boundaries is a life without consequences, and a life without consequences is an inconsequential life.

Perhaps one of the most honest people to state the moral rationale for his denial of God is Aldous Huxley. In *Confessions of a Professional Free-Thinker* Huxley wrote,

I had reasons not to want the world to have meaning, and as a result I assumed the world had no meaning, and I was readily able to find satisfactory grounds for this assumption ... for me, as it undoubtedly was for most of my generation, the philosophy of meaninglessness was an instrument of liberation from a certain moral system. We were opposed to morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom.

Adolph Hitler writes, "The greatest blow that ever struck humanity was the coming of Christianity." Why did he come to this conclusion? Because God is a moral Being who puts a crimp on human license. Hitler described the Almighty as "the God of the deserts, that crazed, stupid, vengeful, Asiatic despot, with the power to make laws! ... that poison with which both Jews and Christians have spoiled and soiled the free, wonderful instincts of man." Hitler didn't want God to exist because he was all about power, and didn't want to live in a world where there might be a power greater than himself.

But Hitler had another reason for hating Christians and Jews: they worship a moral God. (Here's an important corollary: it was Christianity and Judaism that lifted people from a mere animal existence.)



In short, God has revealed Himself to all human beings through His creation. All human beings, including those who've never been exposed to the Bible, can know beyond any doubt that He exists and something of His nature and character. But instead of wanting to know God, we suppress the truth so we can feign sovereignty over our own lives.

To reject God is to dismiss your humanity

We muddle and even diminish our humanity when we reject God.

The truth of God's existence has been revealed with such clarity that people who refuse to acknowledge God must suppress the truth. They must repeatedly and actively submerge the reality that continues to confront them, like a child pushing the jack back in the box. We find such denial in the writing of the notable French biologist and Nobel Prize winner Jacques Monod. In his groundbreaking book, *Chance and Necessity*, he writes that all living beings are designed with a purpose in mind.

One of the fundamental characteristics common to all living beings without exception: that of being objects endowed with a purpose or project, which at the same time they exhibit in their structure and carry out in their performance. [emphasis added]

Every living organism shows that it has a purpose by its design and function. This is so clear that any rational and objective observer would conclude that there is a Designer or a Purposer

in the universe. But Monod professes to be an atheist. As such, he cannot live with this conclusion. So how does he deal with this inconsistency?

*Objectivity nevertheless obliges us to recognize the teleonomic character of living organisms, to admit that in their structure and performance they act projectively — realize and pursue a purpose. Here therefore, at least in appearance, lies a **profound epistemological contradiction**. In fact the central problem of biology lies with this very contradiction, which, if it is only apparent, must be resolved; or else proven to be utterly insoluble, if that should turn out indeed to be the case. [emphasis added]*

Monod sees an inconsistency in modern biology. He says that the modern scientist must categorically assume what science cannot demonstrate, i.e. that there is no God. And at the same time, the scientist cannot deny—indeed, he must affirm—the design of living things. In their structure and performance he observes that they are purposeful.

This juxtaposition of opposing conclusions—the absence of a Designer in a universe replete with design—leaves him without a place to stand. Uncomfortably pressed against the reality of truth, he cannot deal with this inconsistency at the level of scientific inquiry. His only solution is to label it “a profound epistemological contradiction.” To his credit, he at least attempts to be honest about this.

Only the atheist experiences this clash. If we begin with the assumption of no God, we will be perplexed by the design everywhere around us. The theist finds no contradiction in this discovery. Rather, he sees an affirmation of truth. God exists and He is the great Designer and Purposer.

Monod and his fellow atheistic scientists are busy suppressing the truth. What the apostle says about mankind is true of Monod, et al: they had knowledge *about* God, but did not *acknowledge* him *as* God.

The nature of freedom

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Romans 1:21

Paul argues that when natural man denies God in the face of His revelation in creation, the rejection has four parts, a *two-fold inaction* and a corresponding *two-fold result*.

1. The inaction
 - They did **not** glorify him as God
 - They did not **give thanks**
2. The result

- Their **thinking** became **futile** (empty or vain, thoughtless)
- Their **hearts were darkened** (or hardened)

What should be the natural reaction when we realize that ...

- We are not alone in the universe,
- The Creator God exists,
- We discover Him in our observation of and reflection on His creation,
- Our own design and function indicates we have been made for a purpose?

Our natural reaction should be to fall on our knees before God, to give Him glory and thanks for who He is. But instead, the rebellious heart of natural man suppresses the truth and denies the glory and thanksgiving that is God's reasonable due. Such neglect has consequence, both in our hearts and our heads. Our heads become unproductive, our thinking empty. We become, in C.S. Lewis's term, "dumb animals." We give our minds to trivialities. And our hearts became dark, without understanding. In Ephesians, Paul writes: "They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts." Hearts that were once soft and pliable are now hard as stone.

What a price to pay. In rejecting God, we become less than human, we become vain in our thinking and lack compassion. To put it another way, we give up wisdom for folly.

To reject God is to choose hell

Recently I heard Eric Metaxas interview Dr. John C. Rankin about his latest book, provocatively titled [*The Freedom to Choose Hell*](#). I was reminded of something C.S. Lewis writes in *The Great Divorce*: "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.'"

Hell exists because men and women are free. Human beings are free to say no to God and yes to hell! They choose, and then experience the logical consequences of that choice.

God's self-revelation was intended to lead humans to acknowledge and worship Him (Romans 1:19-22). But, instead, human beings became foolish. They abandoned reason and common sense,



created their own gods – idols and illusions - out of their own imagination (Romans 1:23).

For this reason, “God gave them over” (Romans 1:24, 26, 28b) to the consequences of their choice. The Greek word “give over” is *paradidōmi*, and literally means “gave up them to” or “abandoned them to” the logical consequences of their choices. God gives them over to self-inflicted punishment, not an extrinsic penalty. God has abandoned them to the consequences of their free choices.

Let’s briefly examine the nature and extent of human freedom.

Genesis, the creation and the context for freedom

Human beings were created to be free moral agents: makers of history, creators of culture, builders of nations. Humans were designed as conscious contributors to God’s telos, that is, the grand purpose He envisions for the universe. The Bible narrative is framed by the creation, fall, redemption, and consummation of the universe. Genesis 1-3 lays out the foundation of the biblical worldview and thus the basis for the entire narrative.

The narrative opens, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Contrast that with the Darwinian framework: “In the beginning nature ...” These different beginnings lead to very different narratives for all of life.

*Now the earth was **formless** (tō·hû – formlessness/wasteland/idol/ruination/vanity) and **empty** (bō·hû – emptiness/wasteness/abyss), **darkness** (ḥō·šēk darkness/blackness) was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters, Genesis 1:2.*

The initial step of the creation process was making the raw material which was formless, empty and dark. Then the Artist began to shape the raw material. The first “form” was light to illuminate the darkness: *And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light, Genesis 1:3.*

The rest of Genesis 1 records God forming the unformed into higher and higher complexity and order: inorganic material, then organic (plants), then animals, and finally the highest form of His creative expression, humans, the very image of God.

The formless was formed, the emptiness filled, the darkness illuminated—all through the Spirit of God—so that the form and distinctions might be seen and celebrated. And in the final act of creation, the Spirit of God breathed life into the man and woman, distinguishing them from the rest of creation and making them free moral agents.



The proof of human significance is found in the garden where man was placed: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work [‘ā·bāḏ - work, cultivate, serve] it and take care of [šā·mār – to keep and to guard] it.” Man was put in the garden for the purpose of stewarding what God had given. He was to cultivate the garden—to make it flourish—and to protect it from harm, to both develop and conserve it. His significance is established in part by his assignment to steward what God had given, thus fulfilling His purpose.

The human a free moral agent

But there is a second place where man’s significance is established: the tree in the midst of the garden – “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” This is the tree of affirmation, the tree that affirms man as a free moral agent.

And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Genesis 2:9.

God makes one proscription:

The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” Genesis 2:17.

God provides all the human could want, a perfect world and an intimate, unbroken relationship with the Creator. All the trees in the garden but one are intended for food. This tree alone affirms that God is God and man is His creature. It affirms that God is sovereign and man is dependent, living in a moral universe that God has ordered. This tree also affirms man’s volition: he is a free moral agent. He has real personal freedom and the corresponding responsibility for his decisions.

And actually, Adam is free to eat from this tree as well. But logical consequences will follow: he will die! The Hebrew word translated “die” literally means, “dying you shall continually die.”¹⁷ To eat of this fruit is to break God’s moral order and thus to die spiritually, continually separated from God’s intimacy. This naturally leads to physical death as well.

In the modern world we do not want that kind of freedom. We want its counterfeit - *license*, the right to decide without responsibility for those decisions. We want decisions without consequences. We want to follow our base instincts with impunity. We think this is freedom, but actually it is slavery!

Freedom so real we can say no to God!

God does not force your will. We are not puppets on a string, or programmed automatons. No, we are the very image of God, free to make real choices, even free to say no to God and yes to hell.

Genesis 3 records a free man and woman turning their backs on God. Freedom allows us to say no to God. Without such freedom, there could be no love, and love is God's nature and priority. We are free to rebel. But rebellion has tragic consequences for the entire created order.

Adam and Eve rebelled against God and His moral and metaphysical order. Their choice had consequences for their primary relationship with God, but also for all the secondary relationships rooted in that primary relationship. Man's understanding of himself was shattered, as was his relationship with his fellow human beings and his relationship with the rest of creation. Man's rebellion against God produced a comprehensive shattering of all creation.

Only a comprehensive restoration can recover the creation from this shattering, can restore mankind in their primary and secondary relationships.

This is exactly what the cross of Christ provided. The Apostle Paul states this so clearly:

God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross, Colossians 1: 19-20.



At the heart of this salvation is the restored freedom humans knew before the fall, the freedom to be good and do good. True freedom, living within the creation order, is the choosing of good. When we choose the good, freedom grows. License is a counterfeit of freedom. When we choose evil, poverty and enslavement grow.

To secure this freedom, God the Father freely chose to send his Son to die. Jesus Christ freely chose to obey. Ponder that for a moment. The Father and the Son freely agreed to provide freedom from sin and death.

God does not manipulate your will. In his interview with Metaxas, Rankin suggested an intriguing restatement of John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave each one of us the freedom to choose to go to hell if we ... want to."

Hell exists because of human freedom

Hell exists because of human freedom. Both human freedom and human responsibility are major themes of scripture. We see this in two trees, one in each testament.

The Old Testament speaks of the tree in the midst of the garden. This is the affirming place of human freedom. In the New Testament, our freedom is secured at Golgotha's tree.

The concept and language of human freedom was born in the Bible. It is a “gift of the Jews” to the world, as historian Thomas Cahill has declared. It can be argued that no foundation for freedom or language of freedom is to be found in Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, nor the world’s animistic religions. Instead, these beget the language of fatalism and human bondage.

Free people will respect their freedom and its source or they will cease to be free.

The theme of free choice launched in Genesis 2 is reaffirmed in the Gospel of John.

*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, **that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.** For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. **He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already,** because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and **men loved the darkness rather than the light,** for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God. John 3:16-21*

This passage is so familiar to Christians. It marks the pivot of all of human history and shows freedom on two levels, divine and human. On the side of the divine, God freely chooses to offer salvation to human beings through the cross where love and justice kiss. Christ freely choose to do the will of the Father by dying on the cross (John 22:42). This is God’s gift of grace offered to “whoever believes.”



Human freedom is enshrined in two trees

Note the moral agency of human beings affirmed in this text:

- Whoever believes
- He who believes ... he who does not believe
- Men loved darkness rather than light

God’s choice offers man a choice. God’s offer of salvation is placed before “whosoever” to offer men and women a choice to have life eternal or to find death, to love light or choose darkness.

Human freedom is enshrined in these two trees, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and Golgotha’s tree. In both, God shows His love and mercy and demonstrates that humans are not puppets or automatons, but are free and responsible imago Dei creatures.

As we saw in [part 1](#), Genesis 1 records God bringing light into existence to overwhelm the darkness. Now in John 3 we see light coming into the world in the person of Jesus Christ. As the Gospel of John affirms, people choose darkness over the light because their deeds are evil. This is another indication of human freedom and its abuse by those who rebel against God.

This radical nature of freedom is found throughout the scriptures.

- From those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, Proverbs 2:13.
- The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know over what they stumble, Proverbs 4: 19.
- I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in Me should remain in darkness, John 12:46.

Which brings us back to Romans 1. For this reason, **“God gave them over”** or **“abandoned them to”** the natural consequences of their choices. Human beings are free to say no to God! And they are free to walk in darkness rather than light. But how profound the consequences of those choices. It is literally to choose hell in time and eternity. We see how the effects of this choice play out in their bodies in the ensuing verses of Romans 1 (24, 26-27, 28b-32).

God is sovereign and man is free, truly free. Man is free to say no to the good, but he cannot live outside the created order. There are natural consequences to saying no! God is God and we are not. We can say no to God and yes to hell, but even in hell we cannot escape God presence.

Where shall I go from your Spirit?

Or where shall I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there!

If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! (Psalm 139:7-8)

We can say no to God and yes to hell, but our choices do not change ultimate reality. In *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis portrays hell as a shrinking place where shrinking human beings revel in their rebellion, hatred and anger. They exist for themselves and with themselves forever.

Every pagan deity enslaves, diminishes our humanity, and opposes God’s intention for us. God is the God of freedom. He sets us free, by grace, to be fully human, to become all He intends for each of us to be.

Rankin summarizes the message of his book this way: “Heaven is for the many who love mercy, hell is for the few who guard bitterness.”

There are only two kinds of people in the end, those who say yes to God and His grace and those who say yes to bitterness and hell.

Our strange new world of foolishness

In a famous quote, G.K. Chesterton defined foolishness: “When people stop believing in God, they don’t believe in nothing, they believe in anything.” That is, “anything” as in “any thing, without discrimination.” The ability to discriminate is an acquired skill. An infant cannot distinguish himself from his mother. By age two, the child has that figured out, but cannot discern between virtue and vice. Now, it looks like a whole segment of society cannot seem to recognize real differences between the sexes.



Not long ago, everyone understood that males use the men’s room, females the women’s. Now, confusion about this matter is all the rage. The media is pushing an agenda, individuals and companies are lobbying, and governments are creating laws permitting biological males to enter bathrooms, dressing rooms, and showers with women and little girls. Some legislatures are writing laws preventing businesses, schools, and other public venues from restricting opposite-sex use of their bathroom facilities. This is insanity, folly, and shame.

And yet, as foolish as this is, it’s not the root problem. The deeper issue is the nature of reality. What is real? Is there an objective world, or only the world inside our heads? Do we have an objective, biologically based sex (male or female) regardless of what we think or believe? Or is the distinction between male and female purely inside our heads, something we make up, we decide?

Today, facts are no longer important; narrative¹⁸ is all the rage. Subjective narrative replaces the hard truth of reality. At one time, the society was able to recognize truth. Today, we are blind to truth. Many no longer believe in external or objective truth that exists outside of or apart from our beliefs. God continues to reveal truth, but we are insensible to that revelation. As Paul has argued, people suppress the truth.

The intolerance of tolerance

We are no longer defined by our Creator, by the facts of our birth and biology. In this postmodern world we no longer identify ourselves in terms of sexuality – a biological term that defines reality, but in terms of gender – a word that is sociologically defined. We determine our own gender and we inscribe and sculpt our bodies to manifest that “gender preference.” We no longer acknowledge the God who created us. We reject Him and live as though we are gods and we can do whatever we want with our bodies or our sexuality, or everything else. (For more on this see my book *Nurturing the Nations*.)

A postmodern mantra is, "I do me and you do you!" In this hyper-tolerant society, you do not judge me and I will not judge you. I will be whoever I want to be and the same for you. There is one major exception to this "you-do-not-judge-me-and-I-will-not-judge-you" view. "If you believe in a God or external created order that we are all accountable to I will not tolerate you. I will judge you as hateful." In this sense, the postmodern position isn't "hyper-tolerant" at all. It turns out to be very intolerant of a huge swath of people.

That intolerance is becoming more evident by the day. As an example, Tim Gill, a multimillionaire tech guru turned LGBTQ activist, has pumped over \$422 million into LGBTQ causes. Now this "tolerant" progressive sees Christians as evil for their "intolerant" moral stance against the LGBTQ agenda. So he is turning his sights on the Christian community. "We're going into the hardest states in the country," he says. "We're going to punish the wicked."

We have created a new, imaginary world, a world free of facts, free from any external law given to whom we must give account. And a curse be on anyone who is intolerant of this new world of ours. As people suppress the truth of God's existence, they also reject the hard facts of the reality He has created.

The foolishness is on full display thanks to a recent project produced by the Family Policy Institute of Washington (FPIW). Joseph Backhold, director of FPIW, recorded his street interviews¹⁹ of postmodern students at the University of Washington straining to challenge a 5'9" Anglo male claiming to be a 6'5" Chinese female.

Maricopa County banker Richard Hernandez has taken things even further. Hernandez, AKA Eva Baphomet Medusa the Dragon Lady²⁰, first changed into a transgendered "woman" and is now mutating into a "female dragon."

I am the Dragon Lady, a pre-op M2F transgender in the process of morphing into a human dragon, becoming a reptoid as I shed my human skin and my physical appearance and my life as a whole leaving my humanness behind and embracing my most natural self awareness as a mythical beast. As for pronouns I prefer to be called "it" and not be referred to as a she or a her.

Welcome to oblivion!



Maybe the transgender movement will become passé. Maybe the new trend will be transspecies. Scientists have already created pig-human embryos in order to harvest "human body parts." Another frontier of modern science is the development of humanoid machines – robots. People are dreaming of, and researchers are working on, the creation of fembots – female

robots for men to experience substitute sex.

This is the staggering utopian world of our illusions. Beware, reader, of the temptation to laugh. Or snort. The matter is not trivial. Weep for Hernandez and his family. Tremble for the culture. What will happen as the world loses its moorings and descends into chaos? What will be the cost in human suffering?

The great exchange

This, then, brings us to verse 22 of Romans 1: "Claiming to be wise, they became fools."

Thinking themselves wise (the Greek *sophos* meaning wisdom, cultivated), they have become fools (the Greek *mōrainō*: become foolish, turn into inert substance, cause to become nonsense). In our post-Christian world, the words wisdom and foolishness are virtually gone from our vocabulary. When did you last hear anyone speak of wisdom? How often do you hear someone spoken of as foolish?

Wisdom is the moral application of truth. Folly is the suppression of truth for wicked purposes. These are discreet, real categories in a moral universe.

In recent history, intelligence has been valued over character. "He's the smartest person in the room" is high praise. It takes intellect to get into an elite university; character is optional. We've all met smart people who are foolish, and those with little schooling who are, nevertheless, very wise. In today's postmodern and neo-pagan world, imagination is no longer moored to reality. Witness the tragic example of Richard Hernandez becoming Eva Baphomet Medusa the Dragon Lady. Ours is a world without reason or morals, a world of nonsense and irrationality.

The prophet Isaiah warns of this unleashing of folly on the world.

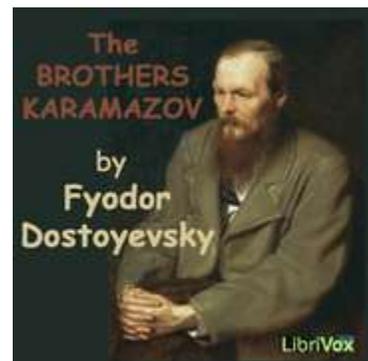
Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight! (Isaiah 5: 20-21)

Postmoderns are too clever by half. They are turning the world upside down, actively promoting evil as if it were good and condemning those who would call it evil. They are creating an illusionary world, one without boundaries, a world that will lead only to suffering and despair.

The great Russian novelist Feodor Dostoevsky captures the conclusion of such foolishness in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

If you were to destroy in mankind the belief in immortality, not only love but every living force maintaining the life of the world would at once be dried up. Moreover, nothing then would be immoral, everything would be lawful, even cannibalism.

"Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools," Romans 1:22.



Woe to the neo-pagan ideologues in our universities and the media who promulgate this vision and thus condemn the lives of a generation. They are drawing the youth of the West from the moral and metaphysical order of the universe into postmodern foolishness and slavery.

As Ambassador Alan Keyes has reminded us:

We are going to have to find the courage one of these days to tell people that freedom is not an easy discipline. Freedom is not a choice for those who are lazy in their hearts and in their respect for their own moral capacity. Freedom requires that at the end of the day you accept the constraint that it requires – the respect for the laws of nature and nature’s God.

In short, suppression of the truth does not lead to freedom but to bondage, not to a glorious, humane new world but to a world of chaos and death. It leads to foolishness and ultimately the dehumanization of people. There’s no further excuse for ambiguity in the public square. This is a day for courteous but forthright challenge. We need to lovingly resist this fatal delusion if we would arrest the flood of foolishness.

Worship God or creation

Humans were made to worship God, hardwired as worshippers. If we do not worship the living God, we do not cease to worship. Rather, we worship something else.²¹ But what? Or whom?

Paul argues that by suppressing the truth, and opting for foolishness, humans have made a *great exchange*. Not great as in grand or magnificent, but great as in profound. We have exchanged belief systems. This has naturally led to a change in values and, in turn, to wicked behavior.

Two thousand years before Richard Weaver observed, “Ideas have consequences,” the apostle Paul made the same argument. This concept is so important to human flourishing that Paul related it three times in the text. The great exchange began a chain reaction that radically changed the world. It all began with a change in belief system.

In modern societies, we try to solve problems on a behavioral level. But behavior is merely a symptom of a deeper problem, i.e. a faulty paradigm or sacred belief system, a faulty worldview. Today’s moral relativism has jettisoned the concept of sin. Personal moral responsibility as a framework for behavior has disappeared. We think problems are rooted, not inside the person, but in the larger society, in “evils” like “systemic racism” or “structural inequality.” We act as if all evil were institutional, and only an all-powerful government can fix institutional evils.

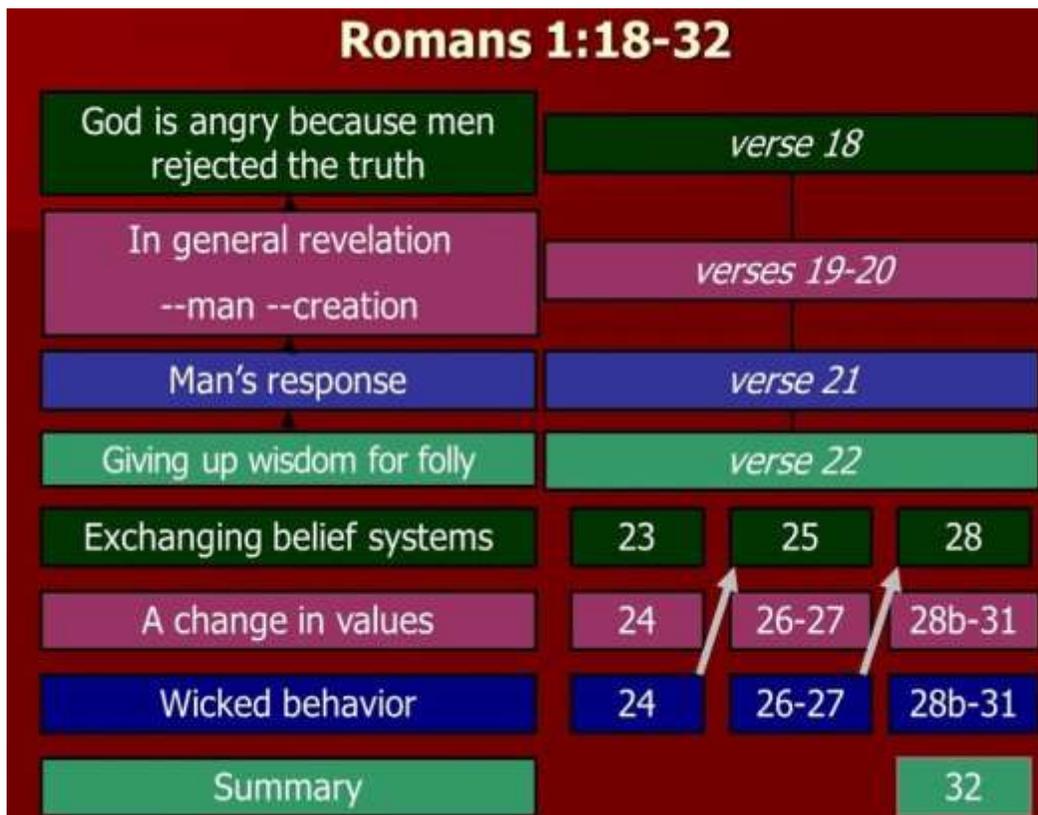
To be sure, institutional evil exists, but all evil is birthed in the heart. This is Paul's point. The problems of society always begin inside man. The great Russian novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn discovered this reality one night in the gulag.

It was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart, and through all human hearts. ... Even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained; and even in the best of all hearts, there remains a small corner of evil.



The Bible describes our condition as two-fold. First, every human is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) with innate value, immutable, God-given rights and tremendous worth. Second, each human is a sinner to the core (Romans 3:23). Evil thoughts, imaginations, words and choices emanate from within.

The graphic indicates the flow of Paul's argument in Romans 1:18-32.



Paul begins the three sets of parallel passages with a great exchange:

- 1:23 – [They] exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.
- 1:25 - They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen.
- 1:28(a) – they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God.

Let's look at each of these in turn.

Verse 23 includes the first reference to the great exchange: “[they] exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.” “Exchanged” translates the Greek *allassō*: “to cause a difference by altering the nature or character of something, to substitute one thing for another.” “Image” is the Greek *eikōn*: “image, likeness, representation.” We get the English word icon from *eikōn*. We have changed the **object** of our worship **from** the invisible God and Creator of the universe **to** icons of created things.

Again, we turn **from** the glorious worship of the immortal God **to** the shameful worship of creatures: mortal human beings or non-human creatures. That is, we move from Judeo-Christian Theism (God as the center of all things), to Pagan Humanism (man as the center), or Pagan Animism (the worship of nature). Distilled to its essence, every religion and philosophy



fits into one of three categories of answers to life's persistent questions. We will worship either the sovereign God, or mankind, or nature.

Traditional cultures have worshipped nature in one of two forms. Pantheism sees all as god, polytheism reveres many finite deities that resemble creatures. The modern world is dominated by various forms of atheism or secular humanism. In this worship system (yes, worship), man is the center of the universe. Human worship is focused on mankind as a whole, on one's tribe,²² or on one's self as a person.

The first great exchange switches the focus of worship from the Creator to the creation. This exchange in gods brings a change in value systems, leading to a shift in behavior. Behavior produces consequences: good consequences if we worship the living God, bad consequences if we worship His creation.

Giving up truth in exchange for a lie

The second reference to the great exchange comes in 25: "They exchanged the **truth** about God for a **lie**, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen." Here, "exchanged" is the Greek word *metallassō*. The prefix *meta* is added to the *allaso* of verse 23. This word means, "barter away, cease and start, one activity for another." They exchanged truth (*alētheia*), facts that correspond to reality, for a lie (*pseudos*, root of our English term pseudo). It's a poor trade-off to give up worship and service of the glorious God for a falsehood.

Whether we worship God, or some aspect of His creation, we will worship. We were made to worship. We cannot avoid worshipping any more than birds can avoid flying or whales swimming. If we deny God, we do not cease to worship, we simply worship created things, things made by God or by human beings (Psalm 115:2-8; Is. 44:9-20).

There are no atheists, only idolaters. Fyodor Dostoyevsky captures this alternative reality in *The Brothers Karamazov*:

To live without God is nothing but torture ... Man cannot live without kneeling ... If he rejects God, he kneels before an idol of wood or of gold or an imaginary one ... They are all idolaters and not atheists. That's what they ought to be called.

Note the two-fold activity: they worshipped (*sebazomai* – honor religiously), and served (*latreuō* – minister or serve in religious duties) the idol.

We see the third reference to the great exchange in verse 28(a): "Furthermore ... they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God." This is stated differently than the first two: "they did not **think it worthwhile**" (regard as worthwhile, judge as good). Although they knew God existed (1:21), they did not think it worthwhile to retain (*echō*: hold on to a relationship with, personally acknowledge, experience) their knowledge of God's existence by entering into

relationship with Him. They did not think it important to move from the knowledge that God existed to knowing Him personally, engaging with Him in worship and service.

We become like the gods we worship

These three passages show that there is, on a personal level, an exchange of sacred belief systems. We are free to choose the object of our worship, but not the outcomes of our choice. We may choose our worldview, but not the consequences of that worldview.

To say it differently, we become like the God (gods) we worship. "Those who make them [idols] become like them; so do all who trust in them," Psa 115:8 ESV. On a corporate level our cult (worship) will determine our culture, and our culture drives the kind of society we produce. While worship is universal (as we have said, even atheists worship), the object of our worship varies. Thus the outworking of that worship in culture-making varies.



We need to be careful what we wish for. God may give it to us! (See Numbers 11:20; Ps 78:29, 106:13-15). When we deny God and live in delusion, we receive the consequences of that delusion. Ideas have consequences. It's not complicated. We either honor the Creator or we worship created things. The object of our worship will determine if we flourish or flounder in our lives, communities, and nations. Because ideas have consequences, a shift in worldview inevitably leads to a shift in values and that to a shift in behavior and that, eventually, to a shift in consequences.

Life brings its own rewards

Three verses in Romans 1 mark the pivot from belief to values and behavior. These verses use three different phrases to indicate this pivot.

- Verse 24 uses "therefore" or "for this reason."
- Verse 26 has "because of this."
- Verse 28 uses "and since" or "and even."

These all mark a turning point in Paul's argument. Because truth has been suppressed, *therefore* a change in "values"²³ naturally follows. People who suppress the truth will abandon a life of virtue for a life of vice. This *internal* change in values will then ultimately lead to an *external* change in behavior.

Romans 1:24	Romans 1:26	Romans 1:28b
“therefore” or “for this reason”	“because of this”	“and since” or “and even”

After each pivot, we find the same exact phrase in each of the three verses. God **gave them over**, *paradidōmi* – “gave over.”

Romans 1:24	Romans 1:26	Romans 1:28b
“therefore” or “for this reason”	“because of this”	“and since” or “and even”
God gave them over	God gave them over	God gave them over

Human beings are free moral agents

We were created in the image of God. Among other things that means we have the attribution of will. We are free moral agents in a way no other creature is. While animals act according to instinct, we alone have the ability to make moral choices and are held accountable for them, by God, and by others. We can make decisions that will change the course of our own lives and the lives of others.

Paul speaks of two alternative worldviews that reject God’s truth: atheism and animism. The atheist regards humans as animals with more developed brains. We are not free; our lives are determined by genetic impulses and chemical processes. The animist sees the universe as mysterious, governed by capricious gods, witches, demons or the spirits of ancestors.

Neither atheism nor animism can provide free moral agency. In both systems, human life is controlled by fatalism, either that of the spirit world (in animism) or of brain chemistry (in atheism). In both, the absence of free moral agency eliminates human responsibility. “The gods made me do it,” or “It’s my genes” are mantras to avoid personal responsibility.

But this is mistaken. Our decisions actually affect history for good or ill. We are morally responsible for the decisions we make. God made us to live responsibly in the framework of the order He has created. He made us for friendship with Him, and friendship, it turns out, requires free moral agency. Robots cannot be friends, and even animals cannot be friends in the same way that human beings can. Simply put, love requires the freedom to choose. When we choose to do good we are blessed.

You can choose your decisions but not the consequences

You are free to suppress the truth and deny the clear revelation of God’s existence. But to do so is foolish and harmful to yourself and others. You can choose your decisions, but not their consequences. You can deny the law of gravity and jump off a three-story building. But consequences will ensue. You will be broken against the reality of the ground. You can claim there is no moral law against adultery. If you commit adultery, you are not breaking this

appetite be vassals; nor can reason rule unless herself be ruled by God, and be obedient to Him. [emphasis added]

It is internal obedience to God's laws that brings true freedom. Disobedience of God's laws does not lead to freedom, but to slavery. Beliefs and values are both internal. Now the writer pivots from the internal to the external, from immoral thoughts to wicked behavior. We see the outworking of our vain imaginations and hard hearts (Romans 1:21). Foolishness has its way (verse 22). From internal self-government and its rewards of freedom, humans degenerated to self-indulgence and instant gratification.

The enslavement of addiction



Have you known someone enslaved to addiction? A drug or alcohol addiction, perhaps, or sex, pornography, gambling, etc. If you know someone like this, you know that they are enslaved by their addiction. Their lives and the lives of their children and spouse are often ruined.

I know a very smart and extremely talented young man whose life has been shaped by one foolish choice after another. One act after another of rebellion against God and the moral universe has left his life in utter ruin. He has cut himself off from his family, has lost his wife and beautiful children.

His life is a wasteland. At one point he was extremely popular, now he has few friends left. When he is sober he cries about the mess he has made with his life. What seems to be missing is a simple act of repentance before the God whose arms are always open to receive penitent sinners.

Our postmodern world calls this "freedom" but this is a delusion. In reality, it is bondage.

Ideas have consequences. When a person exchanges truth for lie, their internal moral compass begins to move away from true north. As their values shift internally, the next thing to move will be external behavior.

Pagan beliefs produce pagan behaviors

In the West, we are witnessing the rise of the new barbarism – the collapse of civilization and reversion to animal instincts (a description that may be too generous for what we are witnessing). People do not want to be under anyone's authority. The bottom line: they want license—"exorbitant freedom"—to do whatever they feel like doing ("so long as it doesn't hurt anyone else!" they say) without responsibility for their actions. License is the autonomy to do wrong.

Moral economist Michael Novak makes a distinction between license and liberty: “License is the freedom to follow one’s instincts and do as one desires, as naturally as cats and dogs do. Liberty is the duty to do what ... one knows that one ought to do.”

Freedom is the opportunity to do good. People who are truly free govern themselves within the framework of God’s laws and ordinances. This is the stuff civilization is made of. When we abandon self-control, we are choosing to turn away from a just and humane social order in favor of chaos and social disintegration.

The nature of freedom

Laura Ingalls Wilder, author of *The Little House on the Prairie* series, reflects on how she came to discover this truth as a child. One July 4th she was pondering the relationship between the words of the American Declaration of Independence and the wonderful national hymn My Country, ‘Tis of Thee.

Suddenly she had a completely new thought. The Declaration [of Independence] and the song [My Country ‘Tis of Thee] came together in her mind, and she thought: God is America’s king. She thought: Americans won’t obey any king on earth. Americans are free. That means they have to obey their own consciences. No king bosses Pa; he has to boss himself. Why (she thought), when I’m a little older, Pa and Ma will stop telling me what to do, and there isn’t anyone else who has a right to give me orders. I will have to make myself be good.

Her whole mind seemed to be lighted up by that thought. This is what it means to be free. It means you have to be good. ‘Our father’s God, author of liberty...’ The laws of Nature and of Nature’s God endow you with the right to life and liberty. Then you have to keep the laws of God, for God’s law is the only thing that gives you a right to be free.[1]

This profound insight is nothing less than the very bedrock of American civilization, and we are rapidly throwing it away. Unless this changes, chaos and social disintegration will surely follow. In contrast to freedom to do what is right and good, license is the “right” to do the wrong thing. Little thought is given to others, or to the consequences. Feeling good is the standard of behavior. The focus is on indulging the self. There is no moral order, no authority outside one’s own will.

Modern libertines want to “liberate” humankind from traditional institutions, like marriage and church, and moral absolutes. Their goal is to return people to a state of nature where their feelings are allowed to govern them with no moral restraint. They want to follow their noses and their stomachs. They have become, in the famous words of C.S. Lewis, “Men without chests.” Libertines push the envelope in three critical areas:

- Truth: They suppress the truth. They replace truth with lies and illusions.
- Morals: The tolerance of the immoral is a virtue, defending the moral is a vice.

- Beauty: Darkness is considered light, the vulgar is beautiful.

The erosion of Western cultures

Truth, goodness and beauty have been the foundation of Western civilization. This is no longer the case. They have become relative, their influence in society has virtually disappeared.

As we have written elsewhere, as the cult (worship) changes, culture changes. As neo-pagan idolatry grows, so does wickedness and barbarism. Webster's 1828 Dictionary defines a barbarian as, "A man in his rude, savage state; an uncivilized person." As we slide further and further from the conviction of that Judeo-Christian theism that refined Europe, North America and elsewhere, we are witnessing the rise of a new barbarism.

At this writing several major trends evidence a descent into barbarism:

- The attempt to redefine marriage (as if this could ever be done)
- The increase in new socially constructed gender terminology. Facebook lists 56 categories.
- Establishment of transgender restrooms, not only as an additional choice, but as a mandate for all people to accept and use. The ultimate goal is the end of the historic standard of male-female, binary sexuality.²⁴
- The new religion of intersectionality, the tribalism, "victimism," and often violent chaos that is spreading like wildfire on university campuses and spilling over into the broader culture.
- The growing movement to silence, marginalize, and punish those who hold to the truth about marriage.

The new deviancy

Judeo-Christian influence created Western civilization from the impoverished, often enslaved, corrupt, coarse, underdeveloped cultures that predated it. As Dennis Prager has argued, biblical theism created a new form of "deviancy."²⁵ The biblical worldview defied pagan licentiousness in all its forms and led to the freedom of a moral framework. Today, as the culture and civilization established by Judeo-Christian theism fades into the horizon, neo-Paganism is on the rise, manifesting itself in modern barbaric forms. We are witnessing manifestations of ancient pagan culture in our neo-pagan world.

- Sensuality (a degraded view of the body)²⁶



- Self-indulgence (“their god is their stomach” Phil. 3:19)²⁷
- Sexual immorality and faithlessness in marriage (a low view of marriage)²⁸
- Human sacrifice via abortion²⁹ and trafficking in unborn baby parts,³⁰ euthanasia,³¹ assisted suicide³² (a low view of human life)
- Fatalism (a denial of God’s goodness)³³
- Corruption (bribery of the gods)³⁴

Worship of pagan gods is accompanied by adultery, prostitution, fornication and sexual aberration. Sexual promiscuity, behavior divorced from transcendent sexuality, is considered normal.

Cause for weeping

With the denial of God and His created order, there is no anchor for the biblical concept of human beings being made in the image of God. Man is reduced to an animal with base animal instincts. There is no transcendent reality, as reflected in the Judeo-Christian worldview that elevates human beings beyond mere animal existence.

The ABC television series “Scandal” is just one example of the media celebrating adultery.³⁵ In fact, you don’t have to look far to see some real and current examples of unspeakable wickedness. Weep with me to consider these stories from three societies—the USA, England, and Germany—all of which shared a Judeo-Christian heritage.

- Rap music that endorses rape³⁶
- Richard Dawkins defending pedophilia³⁷
- Applauding incest³⁸
- Mandating a transgender onslaught³⁹
- Considering bestiality⁴⁰ merely a lifestyle choice
- Promoting anal sex and sodomy to teens⁴¹



These are the behavioral products of a pagan worldview, the new Paganism that is following in the wake of postmodernism. Judeo-Christian Theism is in fact a rebellion against pagan culture. Sexual purity founded in a transcendent concept of love and intimacy, a commitment to covenantal marriage, is seen as an aberration to pagan culture.⁴² We are witnessing the full onslaught of modern pagan culture in the redefining of human sexuality and the intentional destruction of the natural family.

While these things need to be dealt with on the behavioral level, change will come ultimately from a return to the Judeo-Christian worldview.

Rather than suppressing the truth, we need to recognize the truth and acknowledge, worship, and serve the living God. And we need to present the beauty of this wonderful and intimate alternative universe in winsome ways.

All sexual behavior has consequences

Paul demonstrates the link between the suppression of truth, the denial of God, and the corresponding change in values that leads to behavior changes. In Romans 1 he unpacks the external wicked behavior flowing from pagan culture. Notice the progression in verses 24-31:

1. A categorical statement: they degraded their own bodies, v. 24
2. Specific description of sexual perversion, vv. 26-27
 - Lesbianism
 - Homosexuality
3. A lifestyle of depravity, vv. 28b-31
 - Doing what ought not to be done
 - Inventing ways of doing evil

Let's look at each of these in turn.

1. A categorical statement – 1:24, “Therefore God gave them over ... *for the degrading of their bodies with one another.*”

People who practice a pagan value system degrade (treat shamefully, insult, dishonor) their own bodies. This is not done to them by some external force; they willfully did it to themselves. Through their choices, they ended up insulting and degrading their own bodies.

How tragic! Thinking of themselves as wise, they became fools insulting their own bodies. They simply “followed their nose,” pursued their base animal instincts. They have become more like impulsive animals than the morally conscious human beings they were been created to be.

The destructive folly of homosexual behavior

2. A specific description – 1:26-27,

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

From the general debasing of their own bodies by heterosexual sin comes a further degradation. Men and women are abandoning the natural, complementarian relationships for which they were designed, for unnatural, homosexual relationships.

The order of nature is turned upside down. Women lust for women – lesbianism, and men for men – homosexuality.

Human sexuality is complementarian by design.²⁴ Before the creation, the One and Many, Trinitarian God existed eternally. God created the universe, including human relations, in this same complementarian pattern. When people deny God, they deny their own complementarian design. “Natural sexual relations” refers to God’s design for a man and a woman in covenantal marriage. Same-sex relationships are unnatural in God’s creation order.

In abandoning their design, for unnatural relations, they “received in themselves the due penalty for their error.” In his article, “Together Alone: The Epidemic of Gay Loneliness,” writer Michael Hobbes chronicles a story that reflects the reality Paul is talking about.

Public support for gay marriage has climbed from 27 percent in 1996 to 61 percent in 2016. ... Still, even as we celebrate the scale and speed of this change, the rates of depression, loneliness and substance abuse in the gay community remain stuck in the same place they’ve been for decades. Gay people are now, depending on the study, between 2 and 10 times more likely than straight people to take their own lives. We’re twice as likely to have a major depressive episode. ...

In the Netherlands, where gay marriage has been legal since 2001, gay men remain three times more likely to suffer from a mood disorder than straight men, and 10 times more likely to engage in “suicidal self-harm.” In Sweden, which has had civil unions since 1995 and full marriage since 2009, men married to men have triple the suicide rate of men married to women.

...

He found that gay men everywhere, at every age, have higher rates of cardiovascular disease, cancer, incontinence, erectile dysfunction, allergies and asthma — you name it, we got it. In Canada, Salway eventually discovered, more gay men were dying from suicide than from AIDS, and had been for years. (This might be the case in the U.S. too, he says, but no one has bothered to study it.)

Living in a word of delusion

The word “error” is the Greek word meaning “deception” or “delusion.” When we suppress the truth, denying God and our own design, we are deceiving ourselves. We are living in a world of delusion.⁴³

All human choices have logical consequences. Choices based on truth bring positive consequences; harmful consequences come from choices based on a delusion. Paul speaks of the “**due penalty** of their error.” The term means “**recompense**, an exchange based on what is deserved (good or bad).” This is nothing more or less than the natural consequences of behavior.



Perhaps the first consequence is sexual/identity confusion. People no longer know who they are and what they were created to be. Lives are lived without purpose, without thinking in terms of the natural consequences of one’s choices. Today we celebrate the pretense that an individual can change their birth sex as if sex were a malleable characteristic. They debase their own bodies through denying the reality of their sexual biology and DNA by declaring themselves what they are not (boys claiming to be girls, men claiming to be pregnant⁴⁴) and by use of knives and chemicals to alter their biological appearance.

A second consequence is the destructive spread of STDs – sexually transmitted diseases. It’s politically incorrect to point out the correlation between sex outside of marriage and STDs. But, then again, there’s no compassion in being tolerant of behavior that brings real harm to people God considers precious. Love does not cloak the truth: STDs are a natural consequence of illicit sexual behavior. It’s compassionate to call attention to the fact that homosexual intercourse results in a much higher rate of STDs. According to the Center for Disease Control, “Gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men made up an estimated 2% of the population but 55% of people living with HIV in the United States in 2013.”⁴⁵

3. A lifestyle of depravity – 1:28b-31, “Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over ...to do *what ought not to be done.*”

The suppression of truth and the denial of God not only lead to base animal instincts and sexual perversion, but also to what might be called a “lifestyle of vice.” In these few verses, we find a great catalog of vice, violation of the 10 Commandments and the greater moral code. Paul speaks of sins against God (the “first table,” commandments 1-4) which lead to sins against fellow humans (the “second table,” commandments 5-10).

Thinking up new ways of doing evil

Paul continues the litany:

*They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; **they invent ways of doing evil**; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.*

One phrase especially jumps out at me: “they invent ways of doing evil.” The word “invent” means to contrive, to think up. Not content to follow established forms of evil, they use their depravity to invent new kinds of evil. The sexual vice described earlier now morphs into new forms of perversion. As we have written in “Women Rebelling Against the Masculinization of Women,”⁴⁶ in the last few decades, as moral constraints have been thrown off, the concept of male–female sexuality has expanded into 50+ categories.

This text is paraphrased in *The Message* capturing the stench of the depravity and consequences of the great exchange.

Since they didn't bother to acknowledge God, God quit bothering them and let them run loose. And then all hell broke loose: rampant evil, grabbing and grasping, vicious backstabbing. They made life hell on earth with their envy, wanton killing, bickering, and cheating. Look at them: mean-spirited, venomous, fork-tongued God-bashers. Bullies, swaggerers, insufferable windbags! They keep inventing new ways of wrecking lives. They ditch their parents when they get in the way. Stupid, slimy, cruel, cold-blooded. And it's not as if they don't know better. They know perfectly well they're spitting in God's face. And they don't care—worse, they hand out prizes to those who do the worst things best! Romans 1:28-32

Let us weep at the pain and suffering that is a product of this behavior. This is the picture of the modern and postmodern worlds of moral relativism that function without moral restraints because they see evil as good.

Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

The defiance of evil: human behavior hits bottom

The sexual revolution was first a moral and metaphysical revolution. It denied the transcendent and moral nature of the universe because it denied the Creator, the Living God. As the Prophet Isaiah has said:

*Woe to those who call evil good
and good evil,
who put darkness for light
and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet
and sweet for bitter!*

What was once considered good and beautiful—sexual purity, faithfulness in marriage and the joy of soulful sexual intimacy and the wonder of procreation—is now considered bad. What was, not many years ago, unthinkable or perverse is now celebrated as good.

The change in worldview has been a long time in coming, almost a century. But once the Judeo-Christian view of the universe, was replaced with the godless paradigms of the post-Christian and now the post-modern world, the consequences of the onslaught of sexual perversion has come at a reckless pace, like an avalanche that begins with a little snow but builds until its mass destroys everything in its path. Such a person is not acting in ignorance. He is disregarding his conscience. He knows the right thing and chooses the wrong.

It's important to note that this indictment does not apply to all human sin. There is unethical and even immoral human behavior which is rooted in ignorance. For example, Paul wrote to Timothy, "Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief" (1Ti 1:13 NIV). As a devout member of the Jewish nation, Paul was convinced his persecution of Christians was pleasing to God. Only after he met Christ on the road to Damascus did Paul see the light (literally and figuratively).

Jesus spoke of this behavior pattern when he told his disciples, "They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God" (John 16:2 ESV).

The danger of presumptuous sin

But in his letter to the Romans, Paul speaks of those who knowingly transgress, who contravene the decrees of God with a bold face. They know there are consequences for their rebellious behavior. "They know ... that those who do such things deserve death." Yet they continue to choose their libertine lifestyles. They not only do the evil themselves, they justify themselves by giving approval of others who do the same thing.

As Proverbs 2:13-15 says, "From those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness; Who delight in doing evil And rejoice in the perversity of evil; Whose paths are crooked, And who are devious in their ways." There is no shame, no apology, and no sense of guilt or responsibility. *The Message* effectively portrays the brazenness, "They know perfectly well they're spitting in God's face. And they don't care—worse, they hand out prizes to those who do the worst things best!"

This fruit comes from the root of pagan atheistic and pagan animistic worldviews. The Paganism that resulted from the fall had consequences in sexual perversion. God's good gift of human sexuality was corrupted. The nations of the world were infected with Paganism. But the effect of Judeo-Christian Theism, wherever it took root, was a return to a worship of the creator God and a high view of man, marriage and the family.



Now, alas, we are reverting to Paganism. We have brought the past into the future. The sexual revolution is a manifestation of pagan worship. The pagan sexuality that Paul describes here in Romans and that we see increasingly and dramatically in our world today is a manifestation of our idolatry and hardness of heart.

Thankfully, there is a cure more powerful than the disease. In fact, even though we live in a moral universe and God is angry with our sin, there is hope for us. Paul speaks of a redemption, “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew and then the Gentile” (Romans 1:16). Indeed, God’s wrath means good news. His wrath at the ungodliness and unrighteousness of mankind reveals God’s righteousness and goodness. The good news is that Jesus takes our sin on himself and his righteousness is imputed to us by faith (Romans 1: 17). The blood of Christ can soften the heart and restore the soul to life.

Repentance: the essential attitude

Jesus upheld God’s law. He lived the perfect life that Adam failed to live, and that we fail to live. He died in our place. He faced the wrath and justice of God that we deserve as law-breakers and evil-doers. Christ’s death grants complete pardon. He offers us an amazing trade: His righteousness for our sin. Escape from God’s wrath and judgment, in exchange for eternal life with Him. This is truly amazing grace. Undeserved. Unearned. Yet offered freely, in love. Our only hope is in Jesus Christ and His atoning death and resurrection. We must accept His offer, repent, and turn over our lives to our Maker, or Father, our Lord and Savior.

Unless we repent, the barbarism of the past is the world of our future. If we repent, our lives can be substantially restored to what God intended: a vibrant and beautiful human sexuality within the framework of a loving, covenantal marriage between a woman and a man.

We have come to the end of our study, unpacking Paul’s powerful analysis of the importance of worldview in shaping not only how we see the world, but also the kind of lives we live and the kind of communities we create. We have witnessed that God is angry with us because we suppress the truth, truth that is clearly revealed to all human beings through God’s creation. Instead of falling on our knees in worship of the living God, we exchange the truth of God for a lie. We worship and serve created things. What a clear summary pagan Humanism and pagan Animism.

And with the change of worship came the change in value system. And the change in values leads to a change in behavior. As we return to pagan worship we return to pagan practices. This is the stark reality of the opening of the 21st century.

We who call ourselves Christ followers need to do some soul searching. We need a time of repentance. Following repentance, we must not abandon our societies, but reengage them.

This begins by recognizing Paul's powerful emphasis that ideas have consequences. That includes recognizing that both on a personal level and a national level, to exchange truth for a lie, to worship and serve created things rather than the creator, will lead to the breaking down of the family and ultimately the destruction of society.

Let us return to our first love, to worship and serve our Creator and Lord.

Appendix

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² Swanson, J. (1997). Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament) (electronic ed.). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

³ [God Put the Invisible in Plain Sight](#)

⁴ [Sub-Atomic Science Says God Is a Mathematician!](#)

⁵ <http://darrowmillerandfriends.com/2012/07/09/planet-earth-late-great-or-future-great-which-vision-shapes-your-life/>, <http://darrowmillerandfriends.com/2016/11/21/green-its-more-than-mere-ecology/>

⁶ <http://darrowmillerandfriends.com/2013/05/13/creator-creation-how-did-god-do-it/>

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¹⁵ <http://darrowmillerandfriends.com/2016/09/12/counter-culture-distorted-narratives/>

¹⁶ <http://darrowmillerandfriends.com/2015/01/01/art-beauty-creation-abc-cultural-mandate/>

¹⁷ [Ancient Hebrew Research Center](#)

¹⁸ <http://darrowmillerandfriends.com/2016/07/07/narratives-become-pervasive/>

¹⁹ <http://darrowmillerandfriends.com/2016/06/20/our-new-world-of-foolishness/>

²⁰ <http://metamorphosisdragonlady.blogspot.com/>

²¹ <http://darrowmillerandfriends.com/2016/11/28/god-of-sex/>

²² Worship of one's tribe or group is a growing concern. A black Southern Baptist pastor recently left his church saying, "I love the church, but I love black people more." This tribalism is distinct from "mankind" or universal humanism, and from radical autonomy.

²³ The premodern world of Judeo-Christian theism acknowledged a universal moral code. To obey the moral code was an act of virtue, to break it a vice. In the modern and postmodern world there are no moral absolutes, only subjective values, i.e. "my values vs. your values." Here I'm using the term values as a kind of shorthand for moral actions (virtues) and wicked actions (vices).

²⁴ Everything is Binary

²⁵ <http://darrowmillerandfriends.com/2012/04/26/sexual-anarchy-judeo-christian-sexual-morality-as-deviant/>

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- ⁴⁴ <http://darrowmillerandfriends.com/2017/01/16/biblical-language-shapes-healthy-society/>
- ⁴⁵ <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/group/msm/index.html>
- ⁴⁶ [Women Rebellling Against the Masculinization of Women](#)