

God’s Wrath Clearly Revealed (1:24)

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

- “Therefore” connects this section with 1:21-23, where the idolatry of humanity is described. Now Paul begins explaining in more detail how “*the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness*” (1:18).
- “God gave them over” will be repeated in 1:26,28.
- “It needs to be noted that the penalty inflicted belongs to the *moral* sphere as distinguished from the *religious* – religious degeneration is penalized by abandonment to immorality; sin in the religious realm is punished by sin in the moral sphere.”¹
- The wrath of God does not create “*the lusts of their hearts.*” That was already there. The wrath of God does not restrain this “*impurity*” and does not grant them repentance from it.²
- “*Impurity*” in Paul’s writings usually refers to sexual immorality.³
- In response to humanity’s refusal to declare His glory and worship Him, His decree is dishonor:
 - “...*their bodies would be dishonored* [ατιμαζω] among them” (1:24).
 - “...*degrading* [ατιμια] passions” (1:26).

¹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 43.

² Repentance is a gift of God (Acts 5:11; 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25). He does not have to grant this gift. His mercy is an expression of His entirely sovereign choice, and is not dependent in the slightest bit on anything done by man (Romans 9:15,16).

³ 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:7.

- Just as the proclamation of the Gospel reveals “*righteousness of God*” (1:17), the physical practice of immorality reveals “*the wrath of God*” (1:18). God’s wrath is not invisible, in other words. The visible sign of God’s wrath is the immoral practice of humanity (and, presumably, its acceptance).

Suppressing the Truth in Unrighteousness (1:25a)

1:25a *For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature...*

- Paul now returns again to the guilt of humanity that he described in 1:23.
- One of the greatest tools to use in your Bible study is parallelism. Look for phrases or words which may mutually explain each other. In this case, parallelism helps us understand what Paul means by “*the truth of God.*” We compare this passage with another similar passage:

| Verse | Who | Verb | That of God | The Counterfeit |
|-------|---------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1:23 | The “fools” of 1:22 | “...exchanged [αλλασσω]...” | “...the glory of the incorruptible God...” | “...for the image of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.” |
| 1:25 | The “fools” of 1:22 | “...exchanged [μεταλλασσω]...” | “...the truth of God...” | “...for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature...” |

- The phrase “*truth of God*” (1:25) is parallel to “*the glory of... God*” (1:23).

Where They Born This Way?

- Yes. But they can’t blame/credit God for it.
- After the fall of humanity in Genesis 3, all of those born to Adam and Eve are born as fallen as their first

parents: “...through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned...through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners” (Romans 5:17,19).

- This is Paul’s point. We all need the Gospel. We cannot look to the idolater or homosexual or any other sinner and put them in a different category than ourselves. We were all “dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world...we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest” (Ephesians 2:1-3). The difference between them and you isn’t how good, smart, or spiritual you are. The only difference between them and you is: “...but **God**, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-6). God is the difference. Not anything in you.

The Creator Is Blessed Forever (1:25b)

1:25b...rather than the Creator, Who is blessed forever. Amen.

- This is called a “doxology,” a brief expression of praise.⁴
- Remember what Paul has said about humanity: “...even though they knew God, **they did not honor** [δοξαζω, or “glorify”] Him as God or give thanks” (1:21), and they “exchanged **the glory** [δοξα] of the incorruptible God for

⁴ The word “doxology” is taken from the words δοξα, “glory,” and λογος, “word” – a glorious word or a word about glory! Romans 9:5; 11:36; 16:25-27 are also doxologies.

an image” (1:23). God still receives glory. Those who are the people of God by faith in Jesus Christ cannot help but praise Him and declare His glory.

Wrath Revealed: Given Over to an Anti-Gospel Life (1:26,27)

1:26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 1:27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

An Important Point on Interpretation

- Homosexuality is condemned in the Old Testament (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13).⁵ People who wish to justify homosexuality ask, “why apply this part of the Old Testament Law and not other parts?” It’s a good and fair question.
- The answer – and it’s an important principle of interpretation – is that the Law is repeated in the New Testament as a moral standard for God’s new covenant people in Jesus Christ: 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10.⁶

⁵ Examples of the practice as a reason for judgment on a people include Genesis 19:5 (Jude 7); Judges 19:22.

⁶ This goes for other biblical Law, as well. When seeking the standard by which the Church (Christians) must live, ask yourself, “is the Old Testament command given again in the New Testament?” If it is not, then it is likely that the Old Testament command was either unique to the old covenant people’s living together as a nation (which we do not in the new covenant), or the Old Testament command was fulfilled by Christ in His death on the cross.

- As for the frequently-used objection that Jesus never mentions homosexuality, there are two responses:
 - He does define what we now call “traditional marriage” (Matthew 19:4,5//Mark 10:6,7), appealing to the original intent, purpose, and commandment of God in creation (Genesis 2:24,25).
 - The only reason we know of anything Jesus said is because it is recorded in the apostolic writings of the New Testament (the Gospels, to be specific). The same apostolic authors wrote the rest of the New Testament. It is illogical to appeal to Jesus’ statements while ignoring the rest of the apostolic writings, since Jesus’ statements are recorded by apostolic writers!

Why Does God Reveal His Wrath in This Particular Sin?

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| 1:25 | The “fools” of 1:22 | “...exchanged [μεταλλασσω]...” | “...the truth of God...” | “...for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature...” |
| 1:26 | “...their women...and in the same way also the men...” | “...exchanged [μεταλλασσω]...” | “...the natural function...” | “...for that which is unnatural...” |

- Look at the parallels in this chart:
 - In 1:23,25 it is the “fools” of 1:22 which are the subjects. In 1:26, the same “fools” are still the subject, but it gets specific to “their women” among the “fools” and “the men” among the “fools.”
 - The verbs remain similar – it is really the parallel among the verbs which help us see the parallels in the rest of the passages.
 - God’s “glory” is parallel to His “truth,” and has already told us that God’s “invisible attributes...have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made” (1:20). We now arrive at a specific example: the relations between man and woman in covenant marriage (the final part of the creation account in Genesis 2:24!).
 - The “glory” and “truth” of God on display in the marriage relationship is now exchanged for an unnatural relationship. This is a rebellion against the first commandment of God to humanity (Genesis 1:28) prior to the fall of humanity into sin.
- Throughout this section Paul doesn’t use the common New Testament words for man/husband (ανηρ) and woman/wife (γυνη). Instead, he uses words which emphasize our sexual differences, male (αρσεν) and female (θηλυς). These are the very words found in the Greek translation of the creation account, as well: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’...God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; **male and female** [ἄρσεν και θήλυ] He created them” (Genesis 1:26,27).
- This should bring up a good question to you: how is God’s glory connected with right relations between male and female (in a marriage covenant)? Paul answers that question for us: **READ Ephesians 5:22-33**. Biblical marriage (relations

between husband and wife) are symbolic of the Gospel relationship between Christ and the Church. Whereas human marriages are for this life only (Matthew 22:30//Mark 12:25//Luke 20:35; Romans 7:2,3), the marriage of Christ to the Church is eternal. Therefore, **when human beings refuse to give the Creator glory and worship creation, God smashes the Gospel picture in their physical relationships. This is “the wrath of God” revealed.**

It’s Not Too Late: Amazing Grace

The Case of the Thessalonians

- Remember: this is a consequence of idolatry. God has given them over to this downward spiral because they rejected Him as He revealed Himself in creation and in His Word. They worshiped anything except God.
- The Thessalonians were delivered from idolatry: “...you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, Whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, Who rescues us from the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:9,10).
- How did this “turning” occur? Paul thanks God for it, Who used the proclamation of His Word to change their hearts:
 - “We give thanks to God always for all of you...knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Thessalonians 1:2-5).
 - “...we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

- How did Paul preach the Gospel to them? “...we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us...were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children” (1 Thessalonians 2:7,8,11).
- False worship triggers that punishment of God which we see federally legal and culturally accepted in the U.S.A. today. The remedy in the case of those idol-worshippers who became “the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:1) was God working through Gospel-preaching and a heart of genuine love in the preachers.

The Case of the Corinthians

- “...do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, **nor homosexuals**, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. **Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God**” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).
- Jesus can wash, make holy (sanctify), and justify (declare righteous). He can do this in anyone’s life. Anyone.
- “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (1:18), but we can be “saved from the wrath of God through” Christ (Romans 5:9). All must repent and believe to escape God’s wrath against our putting other things above Him (idolatry).