

1. I can summarize this lesson today in one word: “Behavior”.
  - a) This lesson mainly deals with the behavior of a non-believer in God.
  - b) It is also designed as a “negative check-list” for Christian behavior. In other words, if you are guilty of something on this list, God wants you to change your behavior.
  - c) I should also add that if we are guilty of any and all things on this list prior to the time we accept Jesus as payment of our sins, all past sins are done away with. We may still have to pay “society” for our sins, or suffer physical consequences of that sin (e.g. long term affects of drug abuse), but from God’s perspective, it is over and done with.
  - d) I should add even further, that once you are born again, and still struggling with anything on this list, that is understandable. This is not about being perfect. It is about knowing what is a sin and what is good and bad behavior.
2. One of the most common questions asked of Christians is, “What about the people living in the jungles of Africa who have never heard of Jesus? What about their salvation?”
  - a) Whenever I bring up that question in past studies, I always say the answer is in Romans Chapter 1. Now that we’re actually studying that passage, I can’t just say, “See Romans Chapter 1”. ☺ In this lesson, That specific question has to be dealt with.
  - b) The section of Scripture we deal with today gets into the classical question of salvation for people who have never heard of Jesus, past, present and future.
3. Another classical question one gets is “How do you know you are saved?” To expand that question, “Are you telling me that you just say a bunch of magic words and that’s that?”
  - a) The answer to the second question is no. It’s not a matter of saying a bunch of words like, “I believe Jesus died for my sins”, and then surrounding that statement some sort of religious ceremony. The key is believing those words and one’s actions should follow.
  - b) One of the key statements that Paul made in the first lesson is that we are saved only by our faith in Jesus. It begins with our faith in Jesus and ends with our faith in Jesus. We can’t add anything to it. The “religious ceremonies” that surround our verbal commitment to Jesus, make nice ceremonies, but they are just that.
    - i) What’s my point? The point is that our behavior should be a “natural output” of our faith. We are not saved by our behavior, but if we believe, then our behavior should follow.
    - ii) The classic illustration is an elevator. You may have faith that an elevator across the room will hold your weight. You may sincerely believe the elevator will hold our weight. True faith is actually getting in the elevator.
  - c) Getting back to my opening point, the reason I am stating all of this is that this lesson deals with the issue of “behavior”.
    - i) If we believe in Jesus, our behavior should naturally follow. If Jesus is the Lord of our lives, then we should obey what our king commands us to do.
    - ii) This lesson, which is the second half of Chapter 1, is mostly about the behavior of a non-believer. One has to remember that this letter is addressed to Christians. It was so that Christians can understand the difference in behavior between a believer and a nonbeliever.
    - iii) Think of it another way. How does a nonbeliever know you are saved? Can they read your mind and know that believe in Jesus? If Paul wanted us to tell people about Christianity by say, the bumper stickers on our car, then he would have told all of us to go get branded or something like that. Instead, Paul is saying in effect, “It is about you behavior”. We change our behavior not so we get extra credit in heaven, it is because we act in obedience to what God commands for us.

- iv) Further, God commands obedience for our own happiness.
    - a) To live in obedience to God's command leads to a far more productive and happier life than to do the deeds listed in the last half of Romans.
    - b) Further, a way we show others how Christians are different is based on our behavior. It is not the only sign, but it is a sign none-the-less.
    - c) Jesus said that people know you are believers by our love for one another. (John 13:35). In a lot of ways, the "negative traits" listed in this chapter are expanded commentary on the command to love one another. For example, murder is listed. If we love one another, we probably won't be inclined to want to murder someone. ☺
  - v) Finally, think of the negative traits of this lesson as a "regular checklist" to look over every now and then. For example, there may be some anger issue God is trying to clean up in your life. It may have been buried for years. Now, here you are reading Romans for say, the 23<sup>rd</sup> time. All of a sudden, you think about some negative trait that you never dealt with before. One of the functions of the Holy Spirit is to bring buried negative traits to the surface so that we can mature and live more harmony with what God wants for our lives.
  - d) OK, enough negativity, let's go read what's wrong with people. ☺
4. Verse 17: For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."
- a) I talked about this verse in the last lesson. I want to bring them up again, as they are also key to discussing the verses in the remainder of the chapter.
  - b) Notice the phrase "from first to last". A more literal translation is "from faith to faith".
    - i) That means our salvation begins with our faith in God.
    - ii) That means our salvation ends with our faith in God.
    - iii) That means our behavior does not affect our salvation.
    - iv) It is only our salvation that affects our behavior.
    - v) In other words, we can't be "extra saved" by our behavior. There is another issue of rewards in heaven, but we'll save that for another day. Right now, this point is only about the issue of being saved.
  - c) Now let's talk about the phrase "The righteous will live by faith".
    - i) This is a quote of the Old Testament book and prophet Habakkuk 2:4.
    - ii) This half of a verse is quoted three times in the New Testament. Each time is key.
    - iii) It is quoted here in Romans. The emphasis in Romans is about who is "righteous" or "just" in other translations. The idea is "just-as-if-I-have-never sinned". It is about being perfect from God's perspective. The first eight chapters of Romans deal with the issue of who is "righteous" or "just".
    - iv) In other words, much of Romans is an expanded commentary on Habakkuk 2:4 with an emphasis on the word "righteous" (again, "just" in other translations).
      - a) In summary, the emphasis is on "The righteous will live by faith".
    - v) That same quote of Habakkuk 2:4 is also in Galatians 3:11.
      - a) In Galatians, the emphasis is not so much on who is the righteous, but on how a Christian should live. The emphasis is on how we live.
      - b) In summary, the emphasis is on "The righteous will live by faith."
    - vi) That same quote in Habakkuk 2:4 is also in Hebrews 10:38.
      - a) Two verses later in Hebrews, the author spends a whole chapter explaining what "faith" is all about and gives examples of great acts of faith.
      - b) In summary, the emphasis is on "The righteous will live by faith."
    - vii) Getting off topic a bit, the author of Hebrews is unstated. I personally feel the author is Paul because of the triple-emphasis on Habakkuk 2:4.

- a) The reason Paul doesn't state his authorship in Hebrews (again, a common theory) is that many Jewish people resented Paul at this point of his famous career and it would be better he stayed anonymous. Others argue the writing style of Hebrews is different and Paul did not write Hebrews.
    - b) Either way, it's "an amazing coincidence" that a half-verse of the relatively rarely studied book of Habakkuk is quoted three times in the New Testament and is emphasized three times on three different points.
    - c) For all of you fans of Christian history, that phrase "The Just (Righteous) shall live by faith" was a key verse for Martin Luther. The beginning of the Protestant Reformation relied heavily upon this verse.
  - d) OK, the last time I checked this was a study of Romans 1. ☺ Let's get back to Verse 17 as it applies to the rest of the chapter.
    - i) Again, the verse ends with the quote of "The righteous shall live by faith".
    - ii) We're going to spend the rest of the chapter talking about who is not righteous.
    - iii) Why? Partially so we can recognize who "is" and who "is not" saved.
      - a) The other part, as I mentioned in the introduction, is to see this as a checklist for our own behavior. You can't say this enough: It is faith only that affects our salvation. If we have faith, then how we behave should be a natural output based on that faith.
  - e) OK, here we go. Let the condemnation begin. ☺
5. Verse 18: The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,<sup>19</sup> since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.
- a) Here is another of Paul's long and complicated sentences.
  - b) Let me make it easier: The last phrase says, "God has made it plain to them."
    - i) Now notice the phrase "suppress the truth".
    - ii) What Paul is saying is that the existence of God is obvious to anyone. Since that knowledge is obvious, bad behavior stems from the fact that one suppresses the truth about God.
  - c) One of the questions stated in my introduction is the classical question, "What about the people living in the jungles of Africa (or wherever) who never heard of Jesus?"
    - i) Here is the answer: They should look up at the stars and think, "The world could not have existed by accident. There must be a supreme being. Even if there are many gods, somebody must have made them. There has to be a starting point. All creation must stem from a single creator that always existed. If a god is created, there must be a greater god that created that god. There has to be a "starting point" of a god that always existed. (By the way, the most holy name of God means "I am that I am", in that He always existed!)
    - ii) To continue that point, "If there is a creator, what does that God want from me? Am I accountable to Him?" Let's suppose that creator doesn't care if I live or die, why do I then "feel" it's wrong to steal or kill? Why did this creator make me with this instinctive knowledge that killing or stealing is wrong? Why do I care about the lives of other people? Therefore, this creator must care about me and I must be accountable to Him".
    - iii) With that illustration in mind, think about Paul's phrase, "God has made it plain to them". In other words, people are born with a conscious. They instinctively know that hurting others is wrong and we have a need to love others. If one thinks about it logically, there has to be a God that created this need.

- iv) Think of it another way: Most school children are correctly taught that if the earth's orbit were to change by a few degrees off, we would die of heat or cold. If the earth's temperature significantly changed, we would die. If the planets were aligned differently, the gravitational pull could ruin life on earth.
  - v) Those same high school science teachers never talk about the next step: If the earth is so carefully balanced so life exists, there must be a god that did the balancing in the first place. The mathematical odds of this happening accidentally argue in favor of the existence of God.
  - vi) Today, the best argument in favor of the existence of God has to do with our understanding of the "DNA" molecule. This is an extremely complex molecule that is the basic building block of human life. Let's say someone believes the universe is 10 billion years old. Let's say you had one attempt per nanosecond (one one-thousand of a second) to make a human DNA molecule. The odds are still dramatically against you to a point where it is statistically impossible.
    - a) To put it another way, the odds are better of taking a junkyard, shaking it up, and having a jet airplane randomly come out than it is spending 10 billion years trying to randomly make a human DNA molecule.
  - vii) What's my point? The point is what Paul said: "God has made it plain to them."
  - d) Now we can come back to this verse. The point is people purposely turn deny the existence of God so they can do wicked deeds.
    - i) I make the argument the #1 reason people will deny God or deny the existence of Jesus is that people don't want to change their lifestyle. People will come up with all sorts of reasons why Jesus is a myth or God is a myth. What it really boils down to is not the existence of God, but the fact that they don't want to change their behavior in conformity to God's rules for our lives.
  - e) Getting back to the text, the NIV uses the term "wickedness" twice in these two verses.
    - i) The more literal translations (KJV, NASB, etc.) use "unrighteousness".
    - ii) The terms "wickedness" and "unrighteousness" are synonyms. They both refer to doing any sort of act that is displeasing to God.
    - iii) Paul is getting at this point: Christians who grow in their faith continue to mature and grow closer to God. In the same way, those who choose to turn from God get worse and worse as they continue to suppress the knowledge of God.
6. Verse 20: 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 men are without excuse.
- a) The key words here are "without excuse".
    - i) Remember the question of "what about those who live in the jungles of Africa who never heard of God? Paul says, "They are without excuse".
  - b) What this verse is teaching is that the knowledge of God is instinctive.
  - c) God, by definition is perfect. A perfect God should judge people perfectly. Therefore, everyone will receive a "perfect judgment" based on what they did know about God and how they acted upon that knowledge.
  - d) Notice the words "clearly seen" are part of Verse 20.
    - i) That means the existence of God is obvious to anyone.
    - ii) Most polls show that the number of atheists in the world is actually very small. The vast majority of people in the world do believe in the existence of God. You have to suppress a lot of "obvious knowledge" in order to deny God's existence.
  - e) Let's talk about another issue: The "moral atheist". This is the person, who for the most part, lives a good upstanding life in society but refuses to believe in God. Paul here is arguing that turning away from God naturally leads to wickedness. What about them?

- i) There is an appeal to being an atheist. If you don't believe in a God, there is no one to be accountable to, and one can have peace and bliss over that fact.
  - ii) Some people have the self-discipline to live good moral lives without wanting to be accountable to God. The problem is God exists whether they believe it or not. As Paul said, it's "instinctive" that God exists, and people have to willingly suppress that knowledge. Whether we like it or not, we have to live by God's rules in order to spend eternity with God.
  - iii) I am convinced God designed us with a need to "worship something". We'll get into that in latter verses. I will argue that the "moral atheist" secretly worships the fact that he or she can act morally without God's help. They are making a little god out of their ability to be self-disciplined. The problem is, in the end it doesn't work. Further, God still exists whether one wants to believe it or not.
  - iv) Even if they don't commit any of the sins listed in the rest of Romans 1, they are still guilty of suppressing the truth about the existence of God. While they are suppressing the "natural output" of rebellion, that rebellion still exists.
7. Verse 21: 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.
- a) One of the issues were going to deal with is the idea of a physical change in the nonbeliever. To paraphrase the thoughts of Verse 21: "The people who instinctively understood the existence of God, yet suppressed that knowledge, got worse and worse in their behavior until their hearts (i.e., ability to think) were darkened."
  - b) This verse is given from the perspective of the nonbeliever. To read this verse from God's perspective, God is saying, "You want to turn away from me? OK, I gave you free will, and I meant it. Keep turning away and it will get worse and worse".
  - c) Now let's talk about this verse from the perspective of a Christian:
    - i) How do you know if someone is a Christian? Watch their behavior. We can't read people's minds and know if they truly believe Jesus died for sins. We can listen to what people say, but if they truly believe what they say, their actions will follow.
    - ii) One of the best definitions I know of "truth" is "when the word and deed become one". That means one's actions match one's words. Then one's word is truth.
  - d) In context, this verse, and the surrounding verses are about the behavior of the nonbeliever. It doesn't hurt every now and then to check our own behavior against these verses. In other words, ask God, "Is there any issue in my life where I am suppressing Your truth of how I should live? Is there any part of my life where I am still in rebellion to Your desire for how You want me to live?"
    - i) In other words, it is easy to point the finger at other's behavior. It is much harder to point the finger at our own behavior.
  - e) Let's get back to the verse: Notice what the nonbeliever lacked: Gratitude. The verse says the nonbeliever refused to glorify God or give gratitude to God. They became "futile" in their thoughts. That means they ignored God, and went downhill from there.
    - i) A nonbeliever is one who never gives thanks to God for his or her life. It is not so much the acknowledgement of God, but any sort of gratitude for God.
    - ii) Stop and think about some one who has to suffer for no fault of their own. Imagine being crippled or being in consistent pain on a regular basis. Imagine being in jail for a crime you didn't commit. God never promised believers they would be immune from sin. Rotten things happen to all people. The question is what is our attitude despite what is going on all around us?
    - iii) In the bible, neither Jesus nor Paul ever preached the overthrow of the Roman Government. Most Christians were slaves at that time. You don't read either preaching of open violence against oppression. On the other hand,

- a) I'm guessing that if Paul ever was the Roman emperor, he would end slavery there on the spot and let people be free. The point is that freedom and peace come from within, not from circumstances.
  - iv) To have happiness despite whatever situation one is in starts with the worship of God and gratitude to God for whatever blessings you have.
  - v) Next time you are down, ask yourself, "Name 10 things I am grateful for right now". If it's real bad, say, "Lord, thank you for putting me in this situation and help me to remember that everything You do for me has a purpose. I am grateful You put me in this situation that eventually, it will be used for Your glory."
- 8. Verse 22: Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools<sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.
  - a) What this verse is stating is that people claim to be wise, and at the same time worshipped things made by God, such as other men and animals.
  - b) Let's touch upon something I stated earlier. God created us with a need to worship Him. It is built-in to us the same way we have to need for sleep. One can suppress the need for sleep, but it makes us irritable and unpleasant to be around. The same logic applies for our need to worship God. It can be suppressed, but there are negative consequences.
  - c) Paul's point here is that everybody worship's something. People claim to be wise in their worship of "things", but they are foolish in that they worship the things created by God as opposed to God themselves.
    - i) Let's give some modern examples: We worship people in that we give them priority over the worship of God. Think of famous people. "Fans" study their lives and in some cases want to be like them. It can apply to "brilliant professors" as well as celebrities. The point is we make an idol out of a person.
    - ii) There are those who treat the animal world with greater priority than other humans. I will argue that someone who is a devout Christian should never mistreat an animal. The love God gives us should be evident in all we do, and that includes the treatment of animals. We as Christians also understand that God values humanity on a greater level than animals. Those who don't have their priority straight put animals on the same level or higher level than humans.
    - iii) To give a practical illustration, if your dog and a human "stranger" were both drowning, we should rescue the human first, and then, if possible our dog. We may be more attached to our pet, but because God respects human life on a higher plain than animal life, our priority is to help other humans first.
  - d) Let's get back to the need to "worship something". If you want to find out what is somebody's "god", find out where they spend their spare income and spare time.
    - i) I am not arguing that we need to spend every spare moment we have at our church or giving to God. I'm not anti-hobby. My point is that if we love God with all of our hearts, soul, minds and strength, our actions will follow. Our behavior stems from our beliefs. If we love God, our actions follow.
    - ii) This gets us back to Paul's statement here in Romans. Paul is giving the same argument about nonbelievers. Paul is saying people who suppress the truth about God then follow with their actions. Again, "actions follow belief". If you choose to ignore God, your actions will follow.
    - iii) Getting back to our Christian life, if there is a particular action in our life that you or I know is wrong, think about "what is it in my belief system that is causing this action?" "Why am I so afraid to change my behavior? What consequence am I afraid of?" Remember that fear is the opposite of faith. Ask yourself, "Is God big enough that He can handle my fears?" Ask God to give us the faith to overcome our fears. That is what Christian growth is all about.
  - e) Meanwhile, back to the bad behavior. ☺

9. Verse 24: Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.
- a) For the next four verses, we're going to deal with the issue of homosexuality. This is the first of many "signs" that one has turned away from God. We'll get into a discussion of homosexuality in a moment.
  - b) First, one has to understand that "idolatry" and "adultery" are synonymous in the Old Testament.
    - i) Idolatry is about worshipping any god other than the true God.
      - a) It is about breaking one's free-will commitment to God.
    - ii) Adultery is about having sexual relations with anyone but your spouse.
      - a) It is about breaking one's free-will commitment to their spouse.
    - iii) Given that comparison, one can see the similarity. God desires a relationship with us. When we commit our lives to serving Him, it is similar to a marriage in that it is a free will, lifetime commitment out of love. That is why in the Old Testament, when the nation of Israel turns away from God, the "nickname" for this problem is adultery. The term adultery is used as a synonym for idolatry.
    - iv) With all of that in mind, I think that is why Paul first brought up the issue of homosexuality as an example of people who willfully rebel against God.
  - c) Next, let's discuss the phrase "God gave them over". It is used 3 times in this section:
    - i) Verse 24: Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires.
    - ii) Verse 26: Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.
    - iii) Verse 28: He (God) gave them over to a depraved mind.
    - iv) So, what does "gave them over" mean? It is a legal term like a judge giving a condemned criminal over to the bailiff so the criminal can be taken into jail.
    - v) What does it mean in practical terms? It would be like God saying, "Don't do that, it is bad of you." We do that sin anyway. God says again, "Don't do that, it's bad for you". We do that sin anyway. Finally God says, "if that is what you want, I'll change your heart so you really want to commit that sin."
      - a) To paraphrase a preacher I heard on this, "God warning them not to do something, and then God greased the road so that they slid down that path even faster than they intended."
    - vi) Why would God do this? After all, if this behavior is wrong in God's eyes, why would God "give them over" (i.e., make them "go downhill faster") to that sin?
      - a) First of all, think of it as a free-will choice. It is God saying, "OK, if that is what you want, I'll make it even more-so as a lifestyle choice."
      - b) Second, let's logically assume that behavior is going to lead to negative consequences. Sin is always pleasurable at first. That is why it has appeal. But somehow, it never fully satisfies and you want more and more. That is how addicts go downhill. Nobody wants to be an addict on "Day 1".
      - c) By God "speeding up the process" of the consequences of that sin, He is showing us (the victim, and observers) how bad are the consequences. Hopefully, it might encourage that person to want to repent if they more-quickly see the consequences of that sin.
    - vii) Does that mean a person can get "beyond hope"?
      - a) Yes, I do believe there is a point of no return. Jesus even states this himself in John 12:39 and quotes Isaiah 6:10 as His source.
      - b) An equally important point is we as humans never (emphasize never) know that point of no return. We can give up on a person as corrupt beyond repair, but only God knows the future. I take the view that we are to pray for anyone and everyone to repent. Nobody is outside the scope of God's help for changing.

- d) Now we can get back to Verse 24: Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.
  - i) Let me be blunt and crude for a moment: A penis is meant to go inside a vagina. They were designed to go together. That is how God designed us.
  - ii) Now think about something else: If we were no better than the animals, then every male should have sex with every female every time they both agreed to it. My point is, since God created marriage, He desires that we overcome our “natural animal urges” and wants a single one-man, one-woman marriage. God designed the male and female marriage as the ideal for humanity.
    - a) Does that mean divorce is a sin? Interestingly enough, no. Through out the New Testament, there are several places where Paul lists the sins that are “signs” of nonbelievers. Among those places, is later in this chapter. You never see divorce listed as a “sign” of an unbeliever.
    - b) The bible also says God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). He hates in the sense that He (God) is committed to us and will never divorce those who choose Him no matter how much we sin (again, as long we still have faith in Him). In a similar model, God designed the male-female marriage model as the “ideal” to be compared to God’s desire for His relationship with us.
  - iii) With that in mind, let’s get back to Verse 24. This section of Romans is all about the behavior of those who willfully choose to turn away from God. One of the signs that someone has turned from God is that people turn to homosexual behavior. We’ll discuss the specific behavior of that sin in Verse 26.
  - iv) Remember that we cannot read people’s minds. We don’t know if people have faith in God or not. What we can do is observe behavior. Therefore, Paul gives examples of specific behavior to observe as the consequences of turning from God.
- 10. Verse 25: They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen.
  - a) Let’s start with first word “They”. In context, it refers to people who willfully rebel against God to the point where God “gave them over” to specific bad behavior.
  - b) Next is the expression the “truth of God”. It is one thing to say you believe in God. It is another to act upon that belief. If you believe the bible is the Word of God, then your actions should follow.
  - c) Next, Paul says these people believe “a lie”. What is the “lie” in this context?
    - i) Let’s look at something Jesus said, “You (Pharisee’s who refused to believe in Jesus) belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire... When he (the devil) lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44 NIV)
    - ii) The first recorded lie was in the Garden of Eden. That is when the devil told Adam and Eve that eating this fruit would make them “like God” (Genesis 3:5).
    - iii) I am convinced that fact is related here to Verse 25. Paul says “The exchanged the truth of God for a lie”. They bit the apple. ☺
    - iv) Here are some examples of the “lie”:
      - a) They believe they can go to heaven because their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds. They believe the lie that you can get into heaven because you are a “good person”.
      - b) They believe that “things” are god. You can have good things happen to you by worshipping such things.
      - c) They believe their behavior is acceptable to God because “God knows what they are really like and forgives them”.
    - v) Verse 25 says these people “worshipped created things rather than the creator”.
      - a) The lie, in that context is created things are God, and not the true God.



- d) Let's finish the sentence: "rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen."
  - i) When you read through all of Paul's letters, he has this habit of breaking out in praise whenever he mentions God's name. It's a good habit to develop. ☺
  - ii) The key word to me is "forever". The worship of any other god will eventually come to an end. The praise for the true God will go on forever.
  - iii) Stop and think through the centuries of all the foreign god-idols that have come and gone. If you know your ancient history, the Babylonians, the Egyptians, the Greeks and the Romans all had a series of gods that have come and gone. The worship of the true God goes on. Interesting enough, many archeologists point out that some of these societies start out with a monotheistic god, and then as they become corrupt, start developing multiple gods.
  - iv) Also stop and think through the last 2,000 years of the effort to kill Christianity. The Romans spent the better part of 400 years trying to kill every Christian. Even in the middle ages, there were Catholic popes that banned any public reading of the bible in order to keep allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church. The past hundred years has seen the worship of Jesus has survived the best attempts of socialism, communism and countries where other major religions prevail do their best to kill any worship of Jesus. It always failed and always will. It goes back to Paul's words of the Creator--who is forever praised.
  - v) By the way, John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16 says Jesus is the creator of all things!
- 11. Verse 26: Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. <sup>27</sup> In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.
  - a) Now we get into the specific sin of homosexuality.
  - b) This is the second use of the term "gave them over". Here Paul uses the term "shameful lusts" associated with homosexuality.
  - c) Notice Paul specified lesbianism (woman having sexual relations with women) before he condemned the practice of male homosexuality. There is a classical commentary on this point that states that women are more likely to be spiritual than men (Charles Hodge). Look who goes to church and the women almost always outnumber the men. Back to the Garden of Eden, the serpent appealed to Eve and said she could be "like God". He was appealing to her desire to be more spiritual.
  - d) OK, let's talk about the specific sin of homosexuality. It's time to get into trouble. ☹
    - Let's start with a biblical defense course to verify it is a sin in Judeo-Christianity.
    - i) Homosexuality is specifically condemned in both the Old and New Testament. Here in Romans 1:26 is one of the New Testament mentions of that sin.
    - ii) Some people point out that Jesus never condemned homosexuality. At the same time Jesus says that Moses was a prophet sent by God. (e.g., Mark 12:26).
      - a) The first five books of the Old Testament were written by Moses. Jesus quotes all 5 in the Gospels and attributes them to Moses (e.g., Luke 24:27).
      - b) Therefore, if you believe Jesus is God, you must believe Moses wrote the first five books of the bible and they are God inspired.
      - c) My point here is that Moses definitely condemned homosexuality and that Jesus believes the text Moses wrote was God-inspired.
    - iii) Next, let's discuss the argument that some Old Testament laws apply to Christians and others do not. That is true. For example, the circumcision laws given by Moses were intended for Jewish people only and the Book of Acts Chapter 15 states that non-Jewish Christians are not required to perform such a ritual.
      - a) We do know that "some" Old Testament rules do apply to Christians. For example, I'm pretty sure "Do not steal" is still on the books. ☺

- b) Now let's read Moses' condemnation of homosexuality in context of the surrounding verses:
  - (1) Leviticus 18:21 condemns the practice of child-sacrifices to pagan Gods. I'm sure that is still in effect today.
  - (2) Leviticus 18:23 condemns the practice of having sex with animals. I'm sure that is still in effect today.
  - (3) Leviticus 18:22 says any act of homosexuality is an abomination (KJV) or "detestable" (NIV).
  - (4) My point is Leviticus condemns homosexuality.
    - (a) In context, that sin still applies today.
    - (b) Leviticus was written by Moses.
    - (c) Jesus states Leviticus was written by Moses.
    - (d) Jesus says these books were God inspired.
- iv) One final argument to discuss the practice of homosexuality. There are liberal churches that try to argue that Paul's condemnation is not against homosexual monogamous relationships. They try to argue it's ok to have a homosexual "marriage", just not be promiscuous.
  - a) The problem with that argument is they need to study their bible better. The specific words Paul uses in Romans are not "husbands and wives" but uses the biological term "males" and "females". In other words, you cannot correctly translate these words "husbands and wives". They only mean "male and female". They were designed to convey the idea that homosexuality is a detestable sin.
- e) Now that the condemnation is established, it's time for some compassion.
  - i) Are there people who change from homosexuality to heterosexuality? Of course. There are entire ministries designed to help people change. The largest and most famous of which is the "Exodus Ministry" which helps Christians who battle the sin of homosexuality.
  - ii) What about the Christian who came from that lifestyle and then "slip"? If they desire to change, we are to forgive. In that context, it is just like any other sin and should be forgiven accordingly when they request forgiveness.
  - iii) What about the homosexual who says, "I can't help myself. I was born this way".
    - a) First of all, read some studies on identical twins and homosexuality. There is some correlation, but it is not 100%. (I believe the correlation has a lot to do with both twins being raised in the same environment.) Identical twins have the exact same gene structure. Yet, these studies do not show that all identical twins live full homosexual lives. My point is it's not genetic.
    - b) Also, remember how God "gave them over" to their sin. Therefore, when I hear someone say, "I can't help the way I am", I believe it. It's biblical.
    - c) Again, we get back to the issue of "the point of no return". It does exist, but we as humans never know that point.
  - iv) Finally, the Christian-correct answer is to have compassion, but not condone the sin, just like any other sin. If your child commits a sin, they are still your child. You don't "disown" them for say, homosexual behavior. You don't condone the behavior, but you still love them and can minister to them. What does that mean practically? It means if they have a flat tire, you go over and help them. You just don't go to the wedding. ☺ You treat them like a human being with dignity. Once they know you disagree with their behavior, it's not going to do any good to beat them over the head with it. Change has to come from the heart, not by force.

12. Verse 28: Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.<sup>29</sup> They have become filled with every kind of wickedness,
  - a) We are now expanding the scope of “gave them over”.
    - i) Paul just spent a handful of verses specifically on homosexuality for both men and women. This was listed first as it was easy to spot. Some of the other character traits listed in the next several verses require a more careful study of people.
  - b) In this verse, Paul says that God gave them over to a depraved mind. To paraphrase this verse, Paul is saying, “Since people did not think it was worth the effort to deal with the existence of God and be accountable to Him, God changed these people so their behavior went downhill fast”.
  - c) Verse 29 opens with the phrase “every kind of wickedness”.
    - i) In a sense, the rest of the chapter, from Verses 29-32 is just commentary on “every kind of wickedness”. Paul is describing behavior characteristics that stem from turning from God.
    - ii) Most of these are self-explanatory. I’m not going to spend a lot of time on each specific term, which is good news, as we’re near the end of the lesson.
13. Verse 29 (cont.): evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,<sup>30</sup> slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;<sup>31</sup> they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.<sup>32</sup> 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.
  - a) This list is not organized in any specific fashion. Paul’s main point is “You turn from God, and here is what happens to you”.
  - b) By the way, this is a “superset” of possible sins. It does not mean everyone who turns from God commits every one of these sins on a daily basis. Further, this list does not mean that homosexuals go on to commit these other sins. Paul listed homosexuality first as it is a obvious visual example of those who turn from following God’s rules.
  - c) OK, it’s time to turn the conviction a little closer to home. ☺
    - i) Before we tisk-tisk nonbelievers on this list, it’s time to check our own behavior.
    - ii) Can a Christian commit any or all of these sins? Let’s check our personal history, and as long as we are not guilty of bearing false witness, we know this is true.
    - iii) So what’s the difference between a Christian and the people Paul is condemning in this list? The difference is Christians understand and accept this wrong. We turn to God, confess these deeds as wrong. We ask for forgiveness and ask God to help us change our behavior.
    - iv) Paul’s point of this list is the people Paul is talking about those who don’t care if they’re behavior is sinful and are not interested in being accountable to God.
    - v) I stated in my introduction that this lesson is about behavior. It applies to Christian behavior as well as a nonbeliever’s behavior.
    - vi) God is interested in us watching our behavior. He wants us to use His power to change our behavior. It is interesting that the first two steps the “12 Step” program is to acknowledge the problem (Step 1) and then believe that a power greater than ourselves (i.e., God) is necessary (Step 2) to overcome the problem.
  - d) The next issue, if we as a Christian commit one of the sins on this list, can God “give us over” to that sin?
    - i) That’s a tough question, with no set answer. I would begin by saying that if we truly have faith that Jesus died for our sins, that God will never leave us nor forsake us. We as sinning human beings are unfaithful. God is perfect and therefore He is always faithful. Therefore, if we are truly “one of His”, a loving God would never let us get to a “point of no return”.

- ii) God disciplines us because He wants us to mature. In that sense, God can “give us over” to a sin for a time, if no other reason to recognize the bad behavior and cry out to him to change. In order to repent, there has to be a point of hitting rock bottom. We tend to think of that as losing everything. Hitting “rock bottom” is reaching a point where we realize we are powerless to do anything without God’s help. Hopefully, we realize that before we hit a financial or spiritual rock bottom.
  - e) We all have weaknesses toward certain sins the same way each of us have our strengths and weaknesses.
    - i) Whether we are born with that inherit “weakness” or it comes from our upbringing, either way, it is there.
    - ii) The point is we don’t have to succumb to that weakness. When Paul says God “gave them over”, it is about people who willfully turn from God toward whatever sin happens to be their weakness. Then God says, “OK, if that’s what you want... “God gave them over” to that lifestyle choice.
    - iii) Addicts will tell you the only way to end the bad habit is to get away from it. Being near the temptation increases the temptation. Giving in to the temptation increases the desire. The addiction has to be “crucified to death”. It is usually a time consuming and painful process to deal with the long-term consequences. Accountability and peer support are necessary for help.
    - iv) Most Christian churches encourage accountability and support groups not just for addicts, but for all members as well. All of us have to deal with sin.
    - v) Finally, remember to pray for help with your “strengths” as well as your weaknesses. The mistake Christians make is to say to God, “I need help here and here, but over there, I’m ok, all by myself.” Often we fall in the areas of our life that we think we’re self-disciplined enough to handle by ourselves. God does not share His glory with anyone, including you and me.
  - f) Let’s talk about the final verse and wrap this up.
    - i) The last verse is about “recruitment”. Paul is saying that it is not bad enough that these people engage in these behaviors, they recruit others to join them. The verse says they approve of others who do it as well.
    - ii) This is about guilt. We feel less guilty over a sin if others are doing it as well.
    - iii) The same can apply to Christians who sin. We try to “recruit others” to make us feel less guilty about whatever we are doing.
14. Let’s go full circle and get back to my introductory comments: This is about behavior.
- a) Paul is saying, “Do you want evidence of a person who willfully turns from God? Watch their behavior. It will become obvious.” Further, any society can see the list of these sins and watch that society decay due to a lack of morality. The fall of every great civilization includes the decline in morality and indecency toward one another.
  - b) The fall of a society usually begins with turning away from one true God. That society then makes up new gods as we have this inherit need to worship something. That society then goes downhill from there. It is usually evident to watch. The sins listed in the latter verses of this chapter are just evidence of that sin.
  - c) Finally, remember that these sins are a checklist for our own behavior as Christians. If we see any part of our lifestyle fitting with the “list” of the last set of verse, then for the moment, we have rebelled against God in some aspect of our lives. It is very common for Christians to turn over “a, b and c” parts of our lives to God and still not give him “d through z”. That is what maturity as a Christian is all about. Realizing that every aspect of our lives must be dealt with only by our faith in God working through us to change us for the better. It is only by our faith in God that He, through us changes our behavior.
  - d) Unfortunately, there is more condemnation in Chapter 2. We’ll talk about that next week.

15. Let's pray: Father, Help us to remember that we all have faults and all of us have aspects of our lives that are displeasing to you. Help us to comprehend how helpless we are without You. Help us not to be arrogant in our dealings with other people and help us to properly show Your grace to others as you have shown to us. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.